Plurality Redefined: The Emergence of The New Woman in Mukherjee, Divakaruni and Lahiri

By

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DECLARATION

This dissertation − submitted to the Department of English, Dhaka University, Dhaka – is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work except where otherwise stated. It has not been submitted previously anywhere for any award.

Signature:

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Date:

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

In my capacity as supervisor of the candidate's dissertation, I certify this dissertation is the student's own work and to the best of my knowledge all sources of information used have been acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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Abstract

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Diasporic studies is not only limited to the physical movements of a group of people from one place to another; rather, they are more effectively viewed as the analysis of the relation among individuals and communities within a specific spatial-geographical formation. A feminist approach to diasporic studies attempts to configure issues of gender, race, class, and nation, among other identitarian markers, with a view to mapping the identity construction of women based on inequity and differences. Many subsets of ideas are linked to diasporic feminist studies among which postcolonial feminism, postmodern feminism, and transnational feminism deal with questions of plurality, difference, and empowerment.

Some South Asian female writers in the United States of America delineate how the questions of gender, race, and nationality converge to solidify the individuality of fictional South Asian female diasporic characters in the USA. Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri are some of those writers who write about the complex positioning of women from a particular historic-cultural background in diasporic space with regard to their involvement with native communities, and how this involvement is shaped by significant inside and outside cultural, political, and racial aspects. Theorists like Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Avtar Brah, Linda Nicholson, Jane Flax, Inderpal Grewal, and many others have interpreted the complex subject positions of women in relation to new global realities arising from migrations and transnationalism. These epistemological interpretations complement the fictional writings with a discursive framework. Thus, both diasporic writings and films depict how the identity formation of women in the diaspora is refashioned by a conflict between tradition and modernity. The destabilized identity of women, originating from their cultural sensibilities, and as a result of exposure to disconcerting lived experiences, has become a consistent theme of diasporic fictions by women writers.

In this dissertation, I study the identity formation of fictional South Asian women characters through the lens of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism. Postcolonial feminism focuses on the particular issues involving women from disempowered, marginal positions whereas postmodern feminism emphasizes the plurality and differences among women. Diasporic feminism synthesizes the former issues furthering them with discussions on intersectionality and transnationalism. Whereas intersectionality shows the impossibility of reducing one's identity to a single definition, transnationalism deciphers how diasporic condition enables one to simultaneously belong to multiple geographical and psychological spaces. Border crossing and interstitial existence occupy the transnational study of fictional migrant women. In the dissertation, I read the characters as resilient and buoyant in spite of having to face puzzling choices and poignant negotiations. These characters are sometimes devastated and broken because of being exposed to conflicting situations that make them choose between the known and the unknown, between tradition and modernity. However, they somehow devise a strategy to overcome their situations and emerge as new women who are capable of taking responsibilities for the choices they make.

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Introduction

Redefining Fictional South Asian Women in Diasporic Space

In contemporary world literature "diasporic space" is a loaded term in the sense that it is a fertile ground where both epistemological and real-life issues converge to redefine migrants' identities. Diasporic narratives are inherently concerned with nostalgia, displacement, relocation, negotiation, and adaptation. With the fast-growing mobility of information across the globe, diasporic space tends to be more internal than external. Easy and frequent movement of both human and capital among nations has rendered any border crossing a mundane affair. It is now easier for migrants to create little homelands in diasporic space. This is where a question of choice arises for diasporic people regarding the formation of their identities. Free flow of information, goods, and capital paves the way for cultural transnationalism and hybridity. Therefore, diasporic space is now invested with concepts such as adaptation, construction, and transformation.

In the matter of identity formation of immigrants, gender is a defining factor and it is more so when South Asian women migrants are in question. Whether subject to a compulsory or voluntary migration, diasporic people often tend to create a replicated homeland to relive national culture. In this context, national culture assumes a fixed, hence unflinching form, that symbolizes the recuperation of the homeland in the diaspora. This code of national culture enables immigrants to forge identities distinct from the dominant host culture. In the construction of replicated home culture, the role of women has been considerably explored in diaspora studies. It has been argued that in an attempt to create a moral superiority over the impinging Western influence, diasporic communities view the family, and especially women, as the preserver of cultural sanctity (Bhatia 515). As cultural carriers, women are supposed to act in certain ways to uphold tradition which might contradict with their status as migrants. In such situations, women might encounter difficulties in choosing subjectivities between tradition and modernity.

In her insightful essay "The Habit of Ex-nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Bourgeoisie" Anannya Bhattacharjee argues that Indian immigrants create the idea of a nation which is ahistorical and not a geographically bound unit. She opines that this idea of a nation, in

absence of any historical context, is constituted of “a timeless essence of Indian unity in diversity” and “the question of women [is] inextricably linked to nation-ness”(Bhattacharjee 20-28). As women are considered as vessels of storing the traditional values necessary for retaining the idealistic image of the nation in the diaspora, a mandatory division is created in the shared space of immigrant men and women as a domestic and public space. Bhattacharjee notes that whereas men occupy the public space of economic/political advancement, the figure of the woman stands in the domestic space signifying culture and tradition, even if she works outside the home. This is because "…Indian woman is expected to be responsible for maintaining this Indian home in diaspora by remaining true to her Indian womanhood” (Bhattacharjee 32).

South Asian women not only face this externally imposed dilemma but also encounter internalized contradictions which have conditioned them in such a way that they face tougher choices regarding identity formation than their male counterparts. Apala Vasta (2016) analyzes this internal conflict of migrant women by noting that their choices are not always thrust upon them by patriarchal and oppressive cultures. She also observes that diaspora opens up liberatory avenues to women. Conditioning of South Asian women as cultural carriers can be traced back to their historical orientation. Both first and second-generation women immigrants suffer from opposite pulls of tradition and modernity in diasporic space that make the process of their identity formation a complex one.

Faced with contradictory choices diasporic women sometimes resort to fragmented selves to cater to the opposing expectations placed on them. Postmodern feminist thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Patricia Waugh, Linda Nicholson, and Jane Flax explored this fissured identity of women by observing that instability may occur as a consequence of opposite currents that run through the minds of gendered subjects. Some feminist thinkers also hold that Western feminist lens is insufficient to delve into the issues related to women who belong to different races. These thinkers voice the need for incorporating plurality of history, race, and class in feminist discourses. Since women from different backgrounds act differently in diasporic space, analysis of their identity formation also needs a diversified approach.

Transnational feminism is perhaps an appropriate approach to study migrant women’s identity formation across the globe. This approach allows us to focus on the intersectional ties among feminist concerns based on the plurality of history, race, and class. Additionally, this approach makes us think postcolonially by historicizing female subjects. Through historicizing,

postcolonial studies make us aware of international histories, geopolitics, and new forms of imperialism burgeoning across the world. From a broader perspective, both intersectionality and postcolonial epistemology can be assimilated with diaspora studies as has been done by Avtar Brah. Brah thinks of the theory of diaspora as an interpretive framework for exploring "the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy" (16). Her way of looking at diaspora has been helpful in this dissertation as I attempt to bind here the strands of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminist theories with a view to studying some fictional female characters portrayed by three diasporic Indian women writers.

I have read three novels by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri in this dissertation using the lenses of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism. Apart from the novels, a few short stories from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri have also been studied to analyze how the diasporic female characters of these texts grow by adjusting their identities as subjects who are partially attached to their home culture and tradition. The dovetailing of three different strands of feminism has been possible because of some inherent similarities among them.

Postcolonial feminism encourages the inclusion of specific problems faced by women of colour. It also considers the historicity and social contexts of women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) believes that postcolonial feminism posed some challenges to the second wave of white Western feminisms by asking them about the role of history, consciousness, and agency in the making of a coloured, postcolonial female subject. Although postmodernism tries to move beyond essentialism by dissolving categories such as race, class, and history, some feminist critics argue that postmodern feminism has to be inclusive of these categories in order to understand postcolonial feminism. For example, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson observe that an alliance between postmodernism and feminism is possible if postmodernism allows itself to be historical.

Feminism has a long tradition of struggle for rights. It has a close relationship with history as gender bias is a historical element whose roots go deep down in contemporary societies. So feminism inevitably takes the form of social criticism when it engages with the vindication of women's rights and their struggle against oppression. Fraser and Nicholson call this trait of feminism its "social-critical power" (34). The social-critical power of feminism

mentioned by Fraser and Nicholson can be accommodated by postmodernism only when the latter is prepared to admit historicity, a historicity "attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods" (ibid). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) note that postmodernism can more appropriately combine itself with contemporary feminist practices if it addresses the concerns of women around the world in the historicized particularity of their situation.

The final concern of this dissertation is to see the negotiation of migrant South Asian women from a diasporic-feminist point of view. Diasporic identity is consistent with postcolonial and postmodern identity construction for the contradictory traits inherent in it. This contradiction occurs from both the subject's historicity and transformations that distance her from her historical orientation. That is, in diasporic space a subject remains at the same time in a fixed and a fluid state. Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of "cultural hybridity" posits the acceptance of difference without an assumed hierarchy. I study some fictional South Asian woman characters in the coming chapters as going through a course of cultural hybridity.

Stuart Hall's idea of "cultural identity" can be appropriately engaged to describe such a state. According to Hall, cultural identity can be explained in at least two ways. Whereas the first kind of cultural identity reflects the shared historical experiences and cultural codes of a given people, the second, and more complicated cultural identity "is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" (Hall 236). This second kind of cultural identity undergoes a constant transformation and therefore eschews fixity of essence and becomes unstable in nature. Cultural identity can be either complicit with or departing from historical orientation; or it can even be both at the same time. That is why Hall defines cultural identity as "[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*" (237). In this dissertation I argue that South Asian women migrants' diasporic identity is often complicit with the host culture despite being somehow attached to the home culture.

The theoretical framework developed in the dissertation has both disparate and congruous points that frequently lead to contradictory conclusions. For example, whereas postcolonial feminism is in favour of historicizing the subject, postmodern feminism dismisses it by making the subject instable and fragmented. This contradiction creates the essence of the fictional female subjects whose identity formations are studied in the chapters of the dissertation. We find these characters behaving in an incongruous manner while encountering tradition in the home space

and modernity outside. Therefore, redefining these characters in diasporic space requires seeing them in the context of their past, which is preserved inside the home, as well as in the terrain of their transformation−the host culture of the outside world.

Because of using diverse approaches to explore the growth of the female migrants' identities, it has been possible for me to find out the idiosyncratic context in which each character evolves and transforms into a modified version of her older self. I conjecture that a unified method is insufficient to envisage the mutability of women characters in diasporic space. I limited the scope of the dissertation to South Asian diaspora in the United States because the writers whose texts have been read here belong to the Indian-American migrant community. In many cases, they invested their characters with their own experiences. The multiple theoretical approaches are appropriate to texts by authors who are stylistically divergent.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters among which the third, fourth, and fifth ones build their arguments around a few texts by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri from the perspectives of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism. The sixth chapter analyzes two films using the same approach to broaden the dissertation's scope. The first chapter "South Asian Diaspora in the USA: the Role of Race, Culture, and Class in the Identity Construction of Woman Migrants" works as the springboard from which the central argument takes its leap. The chapter initially discusses the concept of diaspora on a general level. It is divided into five sections. Section i gives a historical account of old and new South Asian diasporas; section ii statistically describes the contemporary South Asian diasporic demography of the United States; section iii chronicles the past and present states of migrant fictions by Indian writers; section iv narrows down the scope of migrant fictions to a study of fictional diasporic women; and finally section v theorizes fictional woman migrants' identity construction using the tropes of history, race, and gender.

Chapter Two, "Identity Formation of South Asian Diasporic Women: Connecting Postcolonial and Postmodern Feminism with Diasporic Studies" establishes the theoretical framework for the dissertation creating the basic structure relying upon which the arguments take their shape in the next chapters. At first postcolonial feminism is defined in it. Next, postmodern feminism is linked with postcolonial and diasporic studies to show how their concerns can be applied in reading fictional migrant women's development as characters that are capable of navigating between and across cultures.

Unlike the succeeding chapters which deal with short stories, Chapter Three, "A Study of Transforming Female Characters in South Asian Women Writers" discusses three novels by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri. The epistemological outline remains the same in this chapter like the previous one; however, newer branches of diasporic studies like "neo-cosmopolitanism" and "scattered hegemonies" are incorporated here to analyze the virtual cultural shifts of the subjects. Three texts, *Jasmine*, *Queen of Dreams*, and *The Lowland* are read in this chapter to study the transformations of the central characters that mark that the path of their growth is often jagged as well as full of contradictions.

Chapter Four, "In the Light of Diaspora and Feminism: The Mutability of Some Women Characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Short Stories" discusses some short stories from the collection *Arranged Marriage* by Divakaruni. Here the stories have been selected based on the pivotal characters' transformations that occur with or after their migration to the United States. The chapter argues that these characters are ambiguous as they are inclined to both tradition and modernity, although in their own unique ways.

Chapter Five, named "When Diasporic Experience Takes a Transnational Turn: Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*" is, as the name suggests, a study of Lahiri's female characters from *Unaccustomed Earth*. Lahiri makes a number of her characters negotiate with more than two cultures which creates a type of cosmopolitanism for them. These fictional women grow beyond the binary of "them" and "us" to rise up to a state of fluid identity. This identity is capable of containing the kind of multi-culturalism that also leads to a kind of cultural nomadism.

In the contemporary world, borders among cultural genres are getting increasingly blurred as a result of which literature departments across the globe have incorporated adaptation and film theories into their syllabuses. Along with literary texts, films have been repeatedly considered as a popular cultural form that can also play the role of an identity marker. Sanjena Sathian establishes a relationship between women's liberation and diaspora by noting that diasporic female figures are likely to cross over moral and sexual female boundaries which mostly demarcate anti-colonial sentiments of India as a nation. Sathian believes that Bollywood works as a catalyst for projecting this shifting image of female characters on screen. She maintains that "only in a post-nation-state world, within transnational cultural spaces, can the female figure achieve some degree of liberation" (Sathian 22). Chapter Six, "Reifying Identity

Formation on Screen: A Study of Two South Asian Diasporic Films" highlights these "transnational cultural spaces" within which two women achieve "some degree of liberation". This chapter argues that diasporic space offers some avenues to South Asian women through which it is possible for them to achieve a certain degree of self-actualization. The first film I focus on in this chapter is an adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2006), directed by Mira Nair, and the next *English Vinglish* (2012), directed by Gauri Shinde.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes the arguments built in the dissertation to demonstrate that making and remaking one's self is bound to be a never-ending project. Most South Asian women in diasporic space have unstable identities because of the constant accommodation and adaptation they practice in their everyday lives. Each character is different in her own way. Therefore, the transformations that the characters go through are unique. Nevertheless, these diversities converge at some common points which can be assembled under a broad epistemological spectrum. The unity in diversity is the core idea of redefining South Asian fictional female characters in diasporic space.

Chapter One

South Asian Diaspora in the USA: the Role of Race, Culture, and Class in the Identity Construction of Woman Migrants

South Asian diaspora in the USA has a particular history fraught with certain identity markers. This dissertation construes the identity formation of some fictional South Asian diasporic woman characters arguing that a pervasive struggle is present between tradition and modernity in the mindscape of these characters. This struggle renders their identity fluid and unstable, something that is always in the making rather than made. Because of this conundrum the female characters' transformation in the diasporic space is different from that of their male counterparts. The postcolonial past of the South Asians plays a key role in the shaping of the personality of the women even in the diasporic space. Postmodern feminism is another effective theory in studying the transformation of South Asian women as seen in some texts by three Indian diasporic woman writers who were read for the purpose of the present dissertation. However, since the second chapter of the dissertation discusses the theoretical framework elaborately, the first chapter deals with the key terms used throughout the whole study.

Scholars have explained the word diaspora in innumerable ways, and some of these explanations are included in the present chapter. However, no single definition seems to contain the whole meaning of the term. For fulfilling the purpose of this chapter, the connotation of diaspora will be limited to mass migrations of South Asians to the West from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. Since this chapter focuses on South Asian diaspora, it is now pertinent to discuss what 'South Asia' means in this particular context.

The term 'South Asian' contains an assemblage of disparate languages, nationalities, cultures, and histories belonging to countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Srilanka, Bhutan and Maldives (Leonard 1). However, this dissertation uses this pan-ethnic term in a narrower form since it centers on the writings of three Indian American writers. Nevertheless, the term "South Asian", in its broader spectrum, is also viable here in the sense that it is popular as a coalitional designation for Asian Americans of this particular region. The fictional representation of South Asian migrants to the USA, to be more precise, in the context of this dissertation, Indian diaspora literature, often deals with questions of identity formation of the characters in the host country.

Identity formation is a complex process as the subject experiencing it experiences pulls from both the cultures s/he is involved in. Straddling culture always incurs displacement and dichotomy. This circulatory transformation of one's identity often leads to transmigration. Many Indian writers of the diaspora echo the divergent yet intersecting strands of cultural experiences of the migrants in their tales of migration and return. These writers have created a subgenre of diasporic Indian fiction where one sees a rich exploration of many intriguing questions regarding immigrant identity.

The hyphenated identity of Indian-Americans is a tale of constant adjustment, negotiation, and adaptation. Woman immigrants, most of whom are subject to forced rather than voluntary migration, face the reality of the host country in ways that are different from the men of the same community. In most cases, it is harder for them to cope with their cultural "others," that is, the norms of the new country. Nevertheless, it is also true, as seen in the texts under discussion, that in many examples women are better negotiators in terms of straddling cultures than their male counterparts. The postmodern brand of feminist criticism will also be helpful in explaining the unique position of South Asian women as negotiators with diaspora. However, before going into an elaboration of this issue it is important to focus on the historical phases of Indian diaspora to different parts of the world.

Since 'diaspora' is a key term in the context of the dissertation, the present chapter looks at the way some theorists explore the word. The word 'diaspora,'derived from Greek 'dia' and 'speiriein', etymologically means 'dispresal.' Originally, it was used to imply the migratory diasporic experience of the Jews. The biblical reference to diaspora associates the term with "sin, scattering, emigration and the possibilities of repentance and return" (Cohen 21). However, over the years the term has gathered many more nuances. It is now a loaded word with historical, psychological, and socio-economic connotations. Generally, diaspora involves at least two countries having two different cultures. Present day world's diasporic people replicate linguistic, cultural, and social norms of the home country to create a cultural space in the host country. This invocation of the past home creates a contrast for them that they have to negotiate with the present reality of their world. This process of negotiation reconstructs the meaning of identity of migrant subjects, making them adaptable to a situation that involves both acceptance and rejection. The migrant subject's life thus becomes a constant double living between and through

the present and the past. This dilemma, narrowed to the perspective of diasporic women, is explored in the coming chapters of the dissertation.

The psychological intermingling of present and past homes has literally become a living on the borders with the help of modern means of transport and communication such as airplanes, the internet, and mobile phones. Transnational identity formation is now becoming problematized because of this overlapping of borders that blurs the exclusivity of any single community. Modern life styles with the facilities and opportunities have helped diaspora grow smoothly. William Safran points out the role of "modern modes of transportation and communication, in combination with new international institutions of economic activity following globalization" in the acceleration of immigrants' economic activities across borders of "the countries of their origin and those of their settlement" (xiv). This blurring of any single community accelerates the growing awareness of one's home culture by paradoxically placing it beside that of the host culture. As a consequence, South Asian diasporic women strive to accommodate both cultures in their newly formed identity.

The nostalgia and idea of assimilation with a pure homeland have now become transformed into a shared sense of dislocation, adaptation, suffering, and resistance. The attachment to the homeland has taken multiple forms, which is inclusive of accommodation with and resistance to the host culture. Therefore, diasporic subjects have to experience both separation and entanglement at the same time in the host country-subject who is dealing with a state of mediating cultures.

This mediation of culture requires a blending of South Asian postcolonial nationalist norms[1] with the norms of the host country. The cultural life of migrants is varied and complex. They have to assimilate to native and host cultures. James Clifford (2015) comments on this blending in these words, "[w]hatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist" (307). Therefore, diaspora is about back-and-forth transferences and constant transformations. It requires embracing the host culture as well as retaining the native one.

Robin Cohen (2008) stratifies diaspora studies in four phases in each of which the term 'diaspora' is applied to a specific set of beliefs. In the first phase, diaspora denominates the

[1] These South Asian postcolonial nationalist norms and their imposition on Indian women are discussed to an extent in Chapter Two as well as elsewhere in the dissertation with reference to Partha Chatterjee and other critics.

classical sense of the term, the study of the Jewish experience. Secondly, it means the study of different categories of people as explained by Safran – "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*" (83). In the third phase, according to Cohen, specifically after 9/11, the discussion of diasporas has been drawn into the security agenda. Diasporic subjects are being considered as possible threats to their country of residence after 9/11. Fourthly, diaspora studies are now being increasingly related to the idea of home or homeland and diasporic subjects are being observed to strengthen their rapport with the places of their origin. As an extension of these four phases, Cohen mentions terms like "transnationalism, hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and creolization" that help clarify the complexity and diversity of diaspora (xv-xvi).

The study of woman migrants' mutation depends heavily on terms like "transnationalism" and "hybridity". Homi Bhabha (1994), like Cohen, believes in constant transformations of diasporic subjects. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha speaks of "in between spaces" that provide "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (2). According to him, diaspora is about border lives, a kind of living at the "interstices." This kind of living transforms people as a process of negotiation of "…collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value […]" (2).Therefore, diaspora, in Bhabha's words, is a process of negotiation and transformation.

Stuart Hall (2003), like Bhabha, focuses on the "constant transformation" that cultural identity undergoes in a process of becoming and being (236).The process of becoming and being belongs to the future and to the past. Cultural identity is thus very much embedded in place, time, and history. Nevertheless, like "everything which is historical," cultural identity is always in a flux (Hall 236). The diasporic identity, according to Hall, is a site of continuous play "of history, culture, and power" (Hall 236). Like Hall, Avtar Brah (1996) contends that identity is elusive and enigmatic. A diasporic subject has contesting identities. For Brah, identity is both "subjective and social, and is constituted in and through culture" (21). The trope of transformation is at the core of identity formation in both Hall and Brah.

However, Edward Said (2000) views diaspora more as loss than transformation. He interprets diaspora as exile; its effects for him are solitude and loneliness. He describes exiles as

"cut off from their roots, their land, their past." Consequently, they feel an "urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives…" (140-141).This reconstitution is virtually impossible in the present world. Therefore, Said's analysis of exilic life experience is that of lives painfully incomplete and severed from the place they originally belonged to. The present dissertation argues that diasporic experience is enriching and empowering in some cases, and always in the process of transformative construction; rather than in the process of loss.

Since the introductory part about diasporic identity formation has been established, it is now imperative to steer the discussion towards a more specific direction, namely the Indian diaspora. Therefore, this chapter will now discuss the historical phases of Indian diaspora, divided into the 'old' and 'new' waves of dispersal. It will also look at the actual or real migration of Indian population to the Caribbean Islands, Africa, England, both North and South America and other parts of the world. Then the chapter will show how the fictional portrayal of Indian immigrants reveals the change in the nature and purpose of expatriation. Subsequently, the chapter will move to a gendered analysis of diaspora, paying specific attention to migrant Indian women. It will then discuss how these characters' identities are moulded by postcolonial history and the consideration of race, culture, and class, when viewed from a postmodern perspective.

(i) Old and New South Asian Diasporas

The history of Indian diasporas goes back to migrations during the colonial period when imperial machinations worked behind forced migrations of Indian people to far-flung parts of the empire. This indentured migration was marked by racial classifications as the identity formation apparatus of the diasporic subjects. Parvati Raghuram observes that these subjects were required to "be marked through their migratory trajectory" by racial differences, submerging other vectors of diversity (8). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms the old diaspora as the result of "religious oppression and war, slavery and indenturing," that happened at a time long before the world was thoroughly "consolidated as transnational" (n. pag.). Export of Indian slaves and "the expulsion of convicts from the subcontinent to penal settlements in various parts of the Indian Ocean, and the recruitment of labourers through indenture during the colonial period", according to Rajesh Rai and Peter Reeves, are examples of early Indian diaspora (2).

This same pattern of diaspora is defined in Vijay Mishra's "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora". Tracing the history of the Indian diaspora, Mishra finds that the

first diasporic movements occurred in India as a part of British Imperialist enterprise. Some Indians first embarked on diasporic voyages as laborers, mainly to sugar plantations of British colonies. This old diaspora ended as classic capitalism gave way to advanced capitalism by the mid to late-twentieth century. Then the destination of the migrant people changed from imperial colonies to the metropolitan centres of empire, that is, the former settler colonies. The new diaspora has been accelerated by globalization and facilitated by modern means of communication such as airplanes and the internet. The new diasporic people cherish dreams of developing their career and future; hence this movement is voluntary rather than compulsory as was the case with their colonized predecessors. While in the old *Girmit* or sugar diaspora 'home' symbolizes return to the root for its people, in the *masala* or new diaspora people mostly celebrate adoption to and negotiation with a home away from home.

In "From Sugar to Masala", Sudesh Mishra, like Vijay Mishra, divides the Indian diaspora into two categories − the old and the new. He notes that:

> This distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada, and Britain. (276)

Mishra's adept stratification between indentured and voluntary migrations highlights the case of South Asian migrants who have been influenced by policies of postcolonial governments.

Diasporic decolonization marks the beginning of a new trend of cosmopolitanism for Indian migrants. The nineteenth century saw the rise of migrant traders and professionals, to new terrains, the "developed grounds" of the world (Spivak n. pag). Spivak[2] criticizes the "neo-liberal" world economic system for damaging the possibility of social redistribution of wealth and keeping intact, therefore, a flow of migration from new and developing states to new metropolitan centres of the world. The attraction of the United States of America is immense for these migrants. "[T]he increasingly magnetic pull of the United States" remarks Dave Sangha,

[2] It is ironical that Spivak herself is a South Asian migrant scholar working in the US academy.

"changed the contours of immigration" (125). One of the reasons behind this magnetic pull is the technological advancement of the USA.

Silicon Valley has been providing South Asian migrant IT professionals with their desired careers. Most migrant IT professionals of India have had their basic training in engineering at prestigious Indian universities like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Actually, this massive brain drain has also created controversy because "IIT undergraduates are seen as destined to work and succeed in America" (Bhatia 17). This comment occurs in Sunil Bhatia's *American Karma* in which he interviewed thirty-eight first-generation men and women of Indian origin, of whom the majority worked at a large multinational computer company in southern Connecticut.

South Asian immigrants of the new diaspora have redrawn the demographic map of the United States of the twentieth century. In 1890, more than 90 percent of immigrants to the United States were European, whereas in 1990, only 25 percent of migrants were European, 25 percent were Asian, and 43 percent were from Latin America (Rong and Preissle). There is an interesting connotation of 'South Asia' in the United States scenario. The pan-ethnic term South Asian encompasses people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, The Maldives, China, Japan, Fiji and even the Carribean. But as Vijay Prashad ironically notes, "[t]he stain of ancestry and the hegemony of the word "Indians" remains with us as we seek to make our own way through the morass of the contemporary world"(2). In other words, there is a tendency among Americans to generalize South Asians as Indians. However, the term "Indians" does in fact, represent Indians and people from other countries of the South Asian subcontinent, and together they now number 14 million in the US.

The remarkable shift in the United States demography is not abrupt; rather it is an effect of various historical, socio-political and legal factors. The changes brought in US immigration laws in the 1960s play a significant role in the flow of migrants to the country in the twentieth century. The next section discusses the major controlling factors behind the demographic changes in the US and the effects of these changes on the lives of South Asian diasporic subjects. It should be clarified here that the diasporic demographic patterns of countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and England are beyond the scope of this dissertation since its focus is on South Asian woman migrants to the United States.

(ii) Migration and Reality: The South Asian Diaspora in the United States

The United States has its own unique attitude towards immigration. In her insightful book *Race and Immigration*, Nazli Kibria gives an account of America's immigration philosophy in these words "Immigration has been central to the U.S. nation−building project" (5). From the very beginning of its history, the United States recruited foreign labour for the sake of economic development. In today's context, the U.S. employs labour from abroad in two basic forms. In low-wage jobs, there are foreign workers who work in the agriculture and service industries whereas high-skilled foreign professionals work in U.S. companies.

The demographic picture in the United States has undergone many historical shifts from the very inception of immigration to this country. Until the late 1800s, most immigrants to the United States were from Western Europe, and were from countries like Britain, Ireland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden. The number of immigrants from countries like Italy, Austria and Hungary increased in the early 1900s. "Yet another major shift" states Kibria, took place in the 1970s which was "away from Europe and toward immigrants from Asia and Latin America" (14).

Kibria's observation is echoed by many other social scientists, including Bill Ong Hing, whose book *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy: 1850-1900* consolidates some historical factors that shaped the pattern of demographic change in the U.S. Shifts in U.S. refugee and resettlement policies have played a significant role in the size, residential patterns, and economic profile of the immigrants. Hing traces two major schemes in the U.S. immigration policies that had the most remarkable effect on the resettling people. Before 1965 immigrant Asians could enter the United States only for specific purposes. They were kept in check and could be excluded altogether if necessary. In 1965 the U.S. "established a uniform framework for the admission of all people that, in large part, is still in operation today" (18). Stephanie A. Bohon and Meghan E. Conley (2015) point out epoch-making events like the Great Depression and the two World Wars as the waning factor for immigration flows between Europe and the USA. These writers believe that after 1965 the new immigrant flows mainly comprised of Asians and Latinos who shifted the "ethnic composition" of migrants in the U.S (n.pag.).

The Indian diaspora in North America increased noticeably after the Second World War as a continuation of which a major demographic change took place after the 1965 Immigration

and Naturalization Act. Before 1950 Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indians, and Filipinos were mainly treated as unskilled labourers working in rural farms or service jobs. "But the 1965 amendments infused every group with more professionals so that a significant portion of Asian America is now considered white-collar" (Hing 5). Hing's words are specifically true for Asian Indians since now a large number of Indians take the opportunity of studying and working in the academic sector of the U.S. In 2010, the U.S. immigrant population totaled almost 40 million, constituting 13 percent of the total U.S. population of 309.3 million. Kibria gives this information succinctly thus:

> The 1980s and 1990s saw a sharp rise in foreign-born numbers in the U.S. mainly due to immigration from Latin America and Asia. In 1980, the foreign-born as a percentage of the total U.S. population stood at 6.2 (14.1 million persons) and in 2011 to 13 (40 million persons). In short, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have been an important time for immigration into the U.S. similar in relative scope to the massive flows of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (13-14)

Kibria's statistics explains the rapidly changing picture of the demography of the United States and the role of South Asians in that change. Sunil Bhatia states something similar attributing this change to the elimination of "exclusion acts" in the 1960s.

Sunil Bhatia offers an ethnographic study of the Indian diaspora in *American Karma* where he shows the kind of narratives the Indian middle-class professional community construct to understand their racial assignation. Bhatia observes here that "[f]rom 1990 to 2000, the number of Indian Americans grew by 106 percent, … and is the fastest growing Asian American community" (14). For South Asians, the particular attraction of North America, especially the United States, lies in the fact that the U.S. is conceived as a place where wealth and prosperity are available to everybody. This idea has drawn increasing numbers of South Asians to the United States in the form of students, workers, and immigrants. From the nineteenth century onwards, success stories about South Asian migrants started to unfold in the Silicon Valley and the other professionals mainly settled in the U.K., North America, and Europe.

Ethnographic studies of Indians in several middle-class communities across America reveal that most professional Indians are part of the post-1965 highly skilled, professional

migrants. Many have PhDs and others have master's or equivalent professional degrees. They either work in the IT sector as directors, computer scientists, chemical engineers, biochemists, mid-level managers or as university professors, medical doctors, architects, teachers, social workers etc. A third group consists of female migrants who have advanced degrees in the sciences but have become full-time caregivers (Bhatia 2007).

From the previous paragraph, it becomes obvious that Indians in middle-class communities across America are mostly well-educated and highly skilled professionals. Diasporic Indian writers often portray the characters of their fictional works in the light of this phenomenon. The fictional depiction of diasporic Indians has a quite long tradition and this has induced a considerable volume of critical studies across the globe. The next section puts forward a history of Indian diasporic literature from its inception to its present state.

(iii) Migration and Narrative: Indian Diasporic Writing

Indian writing in English has increasingly been gaining accolades among readers and prize-panel judges. In recent years, Indian writing in English has achieved phenomenal success in the form of prizes and best selling status. The history of English writing in India can perhaps be best understood from a retrospective glance at its colonial past. Many texts show an engagement with the history of the subcontinent in terms of strong emotions such as joy and horror. Independence and subsequent partition in the 1940s left indelible marks on Indian writers and their narratives. Moreover, blending "written and oral traditions, teleological and cyclical understandings of history and narrative and a re-invigoration of both language and genre" give Indian writing a unique identity (Morey16). The postcolonial novel, some outstanding examples of which came from India, has been able to free itself from the "long shadow of British writers" and "has in some sense now come to be that main road, rather than some shady and slightly exotic side street"(ibid). However, despite the specific standard of Indian English writing, its reception amongst the critics was initially mixed.

The emergence of the Indian novel and its reception has undergone a series of major shifts. English literary criticism, having been born in the shade of high imperialism in the nineteenth century, was Eurocentric enough for a long time to have considered Tropical literature from the colonies as inferior. The most spectacular change that took place in Indian English literature's narrative technique coincides with India's journey from the colonial to the postcolonial phase. The history of Indian English literature indicates certain points of progress,

and points of departure from a former period towards a new one. Gita Rajan (2006) notes this periodization by stating that this is a gradual progression of story-telling from colonial to postcolonial and cosmopolitan modes. She observes that this period of story-telling spans from "Forster to Rushdie, and more importantly, to the contemporary, emerging focus on ethics in literature" (139). The modes of narration she mentions change with major historical shifts such as the colonial phase, the postcolonial phase, and the cosmopolitan phase. The relation between these separate historical phases and the changed theme and style of Indian English writing is explained in the coming paragraphs of the present chapter.

The demarcation of colonial, postcolonial, and cosmopolitan periods of Indian English writing is coterminous with changes in both its theme and narrative strategies. Whereas colonial writing was more involved with ideals of nation formation, the postcolonial writers seem "distant from or disillusioned with those ideals" (Riemenschneider 16). Postcolonial writers write with a new confidence, especially in using English as their language. Sunanda Mongia comments on the changes in Indian writing in English by saying that in it one can "discern a pattern of alteration which is characterized not merely by shifts in thematics but more by the adoption, growing, naturalization and final expropriation of the language used" (213). Psychologically as well as technically, the use of the language of the colonizers is an evolving pursuit.

This complicated endeavor is a long process of transformation and adjustments. Mongia stratifies the phases of Indian English writing in his "Recent Indian Fiction in English: An Overview" based on the style and subject matter of the writing. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* (1865) is an example of the phase of the English novel in which writers were divergent in deciding whether to use English in its native form or give it an Indian touch. Then in the 1930s with writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, the Indian English novel started to incorporate elements of home culture in its theme, albeit at times orientating it for a supposedly Western audience. The "clandestine unauthorized use of a colonizing language" ceases to be an issue for the writers of the postcolonial era, though some of them wittingly or unwittingly use Orientalism as a subtext, holds Mongia (214). In order to present themselves as "an object" for Western eyes, these writers use the "exotic orient" as their novel's substance (Mongia 214). Indian English fiction attempts to rise over this obsession with language and starts to focus on contemporary existence from a distinct viewpoint with writers like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth and others.

Thus, most postcolonial writers have been able to shed these linguistic inhibitions by asserting their identity. For example, according to Sheldon I Pollock, the writers of the Indian diaspora, due to their living contact with the English language, use English that is not "stilted, learnt from book English" (3). He sees Indian diasporic English writers as people who are capable of evoking the aroma of Indian life in living English. He calls it a "blend of continuity and experiment" (ibid). Such evolution of Indian English fiction from the 1860s to the present day postcolonial diasporic writing needs to be understood fully to understand its conformity to tradition and the new narrative experiments of the diasporic writers.

Indian English fiction experienced a boom period in the mid-1930s with writers like Mulk Raj Anand, RK Narayan, and Raja Rao. Then the mid-1950s and 1960s again saw significant progress in the hands of writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal. According to Mukesh Ranjan Verma, these writers "changed the face of Indian English novel" (1). It is imperative to mention here authors like Arundhati Roy and others of a later phase who also chose never to leave India, albeit opted to write in English which brought them international fame, including the prestigious Man Booker prize for a few of them. Thirdly, at the beginning of the 1980s, diasporic writers, who are Indian in origin but live abroad, started to receive international recognition. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* started a new trend of free play of language and style, blending fantasy, laughter, irony, and satire. As a continuation of this trend, "a widening of themes and greater stylistic experimentation" marks the next phase of Indian English fiction. Another important development of this phase is "resurgence of women's writing" (Jain 60). Jasbir Jain's words can be matched with Mukesh Ranjan Verma's comment that "[p]erhaps the most striking feature of the contemporary Indian English fiction has been the emergence of feminist literature"(5). He also notes that the women writers are giving voice "to the sufferings, aspirations, and assertions of women in a traditionally male-dominated world" (Verma 5). Thus, the rise of women writers opened up significant new space in the terrain of postcolonial Indian English writing.

At this point, one crucial factor should be invoked to reinforce the central argument of the dissertation. Since the dissertation focuses on South Asian women struggling between tradition and modernity in the diasporic space, it is also necessary to enquire if diasporic writers go through the same experience. This thesis establishes a link between the postcolonial past of South Asian women and their dilemma regarding tradition and modernity. It argues that the

postcolonial past imbues South Asian women with a sense of culture that is essentially opposed to Western culture. The next few sections shed light on similar dilemmas faced by postcolonial Indian English writers.

One major besetting factor for postcolonial Indian English writing is the dichotomy between the nation and the self. The intriguing question of representation puzzled postcolonial Indian English writers and made them choose between two options: narrating Indian nationality or narrating the individual self. An analysis of postcolonial Indian English writing shows that "Indian writing needed to have the capaciousness that was generally granted to the Indian nation itself" (Kumar xvi). This obligation of representing the nation often resulted in the production of "a monumental national drive" (xvi). The possible outcome of such literary works is a kind of polarization between self and nation. In her article "Victim Into Protagonist? *Midnight's Children* And The Post-Rushdie National Narratives Of The Eighties", Josna E. Rege defines the early post-independence period of India as a time that "presses particularly heavily on the individual, molding the personal to the national, reproducing, maintaining and consolidating the national ideology at every level of society" (348). Such impositions of the past on the cultural mindset of postcolonial writers are not unlikely to hinder and even silence the natural, spontaneous flow of literature at a certain point in history.

Rege notes that some Indian critics in the seventies dubiously dubbed Indian English writing "Janus-faced", echoing Tom Nair's term "the modern Janus" for the nation (pg 256). Homi Bhabha also builds on this term by pointing out that nationalism is by definition ambivalent, and that the ambivalence of the nation is mirrored in the very form of any national narrative (qtd. in Rege 256). Rege thinks that many Indian writers of the sixties and seventies turned away from the larger social realm in the face of a centrally imposed nationalism. Since this nationalism was supposed to speak for the individual, the writers of that time were often "destroyed by the tensions between their personal realities and the nationalist ideal," (Rege 348). Their works were "deadened by the creative deadlock that ensued" (ibid). The dichotomy between self and nation forced Indian English writing in the sixties and seventies to walk on a "tightrope" between Indian "authenticity" and English "correctness" (Rege 364). A similar kind of dichotomy is present in South Asian diasporic women who strive to balance between adaptation to host culture and being loyal to the native culture.

A point of departure for Indian English writing from this ambivalence ensued in the eighties when Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* set a new standard for the postcolonial novel in terms of both theme and style. Rege calls this new start an enactment of "a discursive reconfiguration of the relationship between Self and Nation" (342). *Midnight's Children* endeavored to show that there are options open to Indians against the notion of a static national identity. It showed that identity is not necessarily monolithic, but fluid and multiple. This concept, according to Rege, was very liberating for contemporary Indian English writers as it enabled them "to speak in a multiplicity of voices and write in a multiplicity of modes" (243) Thus writers in the eighties broke free from the position of imposed representation of the national self as opposed to the individual one.

The newly found confidence encouraged the Indian English writers of the eighties to experiment with form and content. In her insightful essay, Rege describes this new voice as "based on a celebration of the simultaneous identity and duality of self and nation, a recognition of the creative potential of ambivalence" (366). In fact, at that period quite a few writers started to take their fiction out into the public sphere from the previously cloistered position of interiority. However, not all of them were original or remarkable. Some of them, despite making use of the newfound freedom, tended to, says Rege, "gravitate towards two extremes," which took the form of an urgent need to belong to a Nation-state, or an alienated individuality that did not have any accountability (367). These extremes, a craving for rootedness, and disillusionment with all types of connectivity, are also notable tropes of Indian English writing of the eighties.

During this phase of Indian English writing, a sub-genre of postcolonial writing started to emerge that eventually was given the rubric of diasporic writing. The history of such Indian diasporic writing, however, can be traced back to 1794 when Deen Mahomed (1759-1851), an Indian by birth, published *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* from Cork, England after migrating there in 1784. Deen Mahomet served as a soldier in the European-only regiment of the East India Company and considered Captain Godfrey Evan Baker, an Anglo-Irish Protestant from a wealthy family in Cork as his patron. He attained proficiency in the English language from his working in the regiment. Sojourning to Ireland with Baker, he moved to Britain and emerged as an entrepreneur, opening first a restaurant and then a therapeutic massage and herbal steam bath center.

Another writer named Mirza Abu Taleb Khan wrote an account in Persian from Europe. He was born in Lucknow, India, to a Persian father. Like Deen Mahomed, he was also employed by the East India Company. During a period of personal ordeals, he was encouraged by his Scottish friend Captain Richardson to embark on a journey to England. After his visit to England, France, Ireland, and the Ottoman Empire, he wrote a book on his experiences as a colonial subject. His critical insight into the cultural dynamics of Britain is remarkable, given the time period he rendered it. These two writers' perspectives differ due to the different languages they use. Since Deen Mahomed uses English his addresses are Europeans; his role is to represent his countrymen in response to the voices of Europe. Whereas Abu Taleb wrote about his exotic European experiences to the Indian people back home. Diasporic Indian writing has traveled a long way since then. Postcolonial Indian literature is thus largely a terrain occupied mainly by diasporic Indian writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vasanji, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Before going into an in-depth discussion of the main argument of the dissertation, it seems important to look at the controversy some diasporic Indian English writers have evoked in their homeland, because the writers studied in the coming chapters have often been viewed critically thus. As many diasporic Indian English writers resort to postcolonial themes in their works, they have often been controversial, even when receiving acclaim in the west. In the introduction of the book *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market*, the editors Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau analyse the role of global literary market in the proliferation of post-Rushdian Indian writing in English. Their comparison between the reception of Indian writing in English from India and from abroad thus reveals noteworthy discrepancy. Dwivedi remarks that "if one looks at the pattern and framework of the euphoric success of post-Rushdian IWE in the global literary market, it becomes apparent that it is tendentiously marked by greater prominence being given to Indian diasporic writers than to those settled in and writing from India"(2). This comment links Western publishing policies and the production and marketing of diasporic Indian writing in English directly. Dwivedi goes on to explain further the difference in representation of Indian ethnicity by writers from inside and outside India. He opines that the diasporic version of India gets primary focus in Eurocentric scholarship and postcolonial studies. Two of the writers studied in this dissertation, i.e. Bharati Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni, and to some extent, even Jhumpa Lahiri, have often been considered as patronized by Western publishing houses due to the orientating propensities of their writing.

Tabish Khair also registers the complicated relationship between postcolonial and diasporic Indian writing. In the 'Foreword' of *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, Khair observes: "[P]ostcolonialism and diaspora: it is difficult to say, at least in the context of Indian literatures in English, which is the evil twin and which the good one" (vii). This comment is particularly pertinent in the Indian context because of the country's colonial past. Postcolonial literature contributes in some ways in the commoditization of human experiences, thereby promoting a new kind of colonization. This idea can be elaborated by observing that many diasporic Indian writers are criticized for representing their country of origin in too palatable ways to Western readers for the sake of popularity.

The writers studied in this dissertation have sometimes been accused for using their postcolonial past in derogatory ways for Western audiences. For example, Sushma Tandon notes that in the portrayal of Jasmine, Bharati Mukherjee reinforces images of the Third World woman as "ignorant, traditional, and domestic−in short, a victim awaiting rescue" (146). Mukherjee, according to Tandon (2004), is also critical of the backward culture and economy of the third world. Debjani Banerjee (1993) also castigates Mukherjee for catering to a First World audience and for mining the Third World for fictional material. Husne Jahan criticizes Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage* as embodying the "inevitable tension" between postcolonial origins and "an adjustment to a country viewed as the centre of neo-imperial power…"(76). Jahan also censures Divakaruni for Orientalist perceptions of many aspects of Indian culture and society. Lavina Dhingra Shankar disparages Jhumpa Lahiri for her short story "The Third and Final Continent" in *Interpreter of Maladies.* The story's protagonist visits India to bring back pajamas and Darjeeling tea, an act that Shankar defines as "not only condescending, but entirely imperialistic" (45). She also criticizes Lahiri for her generalization of economic opportunities available in the USA, which are absent in India. Shankar notes that through this generalization Lahiri "stereotypes the First World-Third World divide"(46). Therefore, Tabish Khair's skeptical evaluation of diasporic writing is echoed by a number of critics about the fictional works of Mukherjee, Divakaruni, and Lahiri.

However, it would be an oversimplification to label diasporic Indian English writers as neocolonizers who have achieved fame at the costs of the history, culture, and customs of their country. Diaspora writing all over the world is an acknowledged stream in literature, social studies, and anthropology. Diasporic writes experience poignant transitions where they have to assimilate different cultural identities to create hybrid and cosmopolitan selves. Previously colonized countries have an essentially ambiguous attitude towards postcolonial and diasporic studies.

As postcolonial writers have to assimilate their disparate cultural identities to create a hybrid self, so do the characters of their fictions. The woman characters have to deal with more challenging situations. They have to adhere to two completely opposite pulls. Whereas the tradition of their postcolonial past requires them to uphold the home culture, the diasporic space within which they have to survive wants them to be adaptable and accommodating. At this point, it is imperative to quote at length from Partha Chatterjee's essay "Our Modernity" to achieve a better understanding of the binary terms "tradition/modernity". Commenting on the ambivalent reception of modernity by Indian ideals of nationhood, Chatterjee observes: "because of the way in which the history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism, we have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality" ("Our Modernity"14). Chatterjee notes that in Indian history the prejudiced idea of modernity, caused by the country's colonial past, is unable to connect itself with the universal domain of free discourse. Therefore, Indian idea of modernity is inextricably linked with its postcolonial nationhood.

Now it is pertinent to question whether Indian diasporic writers practice neocolonialism by compromising nationalistic cultural values in favour of the modernity of the host land. Partha Chatterjee observes (1997) that instilling of modernity into ethnicity is as inevitable as inhaling the open air in the journey from tradition to modernity. Even the consciousness of imperialist practices and resistance against them are also parts of modernity. Chatterjee notes in an insightful observation that the "burden of reason, dreams of freedom; the desire for power, resistance to power: all of these are elements of modernity. There is no promised land of modernity outside the network of power" ("Our Modernity"19).Therefore, the only way to face modernity is to learn ways of dealing with it. Again, a quotation from Chatterjee shows what he

suggests about dealing with modernism in the Indian context. "…one cannot be for or against modernity; one can only devise strategies for coping with it. These strategies are sometimes beneficial, often destructive; sometimes they are tolerant, perhaps all too often they are fierce and violent" (ibid). Diasporic writers, in order to cope with their new lives, have to devise ways of expressing themselves which might not always be uncomplicated and innocent; therefore, the characters they portray might sometimes even seem to uphold neo-imperial ideas.

However, there are critics who have devised new ways of evaluating diasporic writers' works. For example, in *Migrant Voices in Literatures in English*, Sheo Bhushan Shukla and Anu Shukla point out the need for an alternative discourse and poetics to evaluate diasporic writing. They think that a new discourse should offer a "happy blend of the East and the West … need not be dominantly oriental" (16).There are many diasporic writers who create characters drawing upon Indian archetypes of men and women but "invest them with the new life and hunger for the unknown and unknowable" (ibid).These writers "in/scribe" rather than "de/scribe" India; instead of inventing its myths they reinvent them (ibid).

Postcolonial and/or diasporic writing can be best understood through awareness of all its complexities and complicities. Sandra Ponzanesi (2004) analyses the predicament of diasporic writers as both a material condition of dislocation and a postmodern intellectual notion that expresses existential dispersion. She illustrates this idea by saying that "diasporic spaces allow for the representation of those who straddle two or more cultures, languages, and ethnicities and offer a way of rethinking postcolonialism as blurring the lines of national enclaves" (xv). At the same time, postcolonial and diasporic writers unsettle the center-periphery discourse of imperialism. They articulate a changed, merged, differently focused perspectives on their adoptive cultures. They strike their historically different roots in new cultural grounds. These multiple roots create a complicated identity for the diasporic writer. They have to go through a painful period of transition to reach a state of hybridity, although successful transitions can alter their feelings of dislocation and loss. As Gina Wisker (2006) notes, diasporic writers can positively transform their position "from one of loss and liminality to a new configuration of hybridity and cosmopolitanism that affects everyone" (22). Therefore, diasporic writing can by no means be dismissed as neo-colonial or market-oriented. Rather, one has to be sensitive to the complexities and complicities of diasporic writing.

Ponzanesi (2006) observes that the strength of diasporic writing lies in the pain that originates from dwelling between tradition and modernity, past and present, or peripheries and cosmopolitan life. Ponzanesi and Bernheimer attribute the strength of migrant literature to its unhomeliness. Bernheimer observes that the quality of dispossession, akin to the feeling of otherness, is "migrant literature's great strength" (qtd. in Sandra Ponzanesi12). To sum up, since diasporic writing is complicated, its evaluation too, has to be multimodal as well as discursive. Having validated the problematic voice of diasporic writers, the present discussion will now focus on the international reception of Indian diasporic writers.

Since all the three writers to be studied in this dissertation, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, belong to the category of South Asian American diasporic writers, it is imperative to give a brief overview of the history of this literature. South Asian American diasporic literature has indeed a considerable history to its credit already. This literature is based on diasporic experiences and trajectories. Rajini Srikanth notes in *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America,* "[t]he earliest South Asian American experience to receive literary treatment was that of the Indians (primarily Shikhs) who came to work on the farmlands of California's Imperial valley in the early 1900s" (6). In the early years of the twentieth century, the experiences of Punjabi farmers and their wives were chronicled in songs and poems which were anthologized later in 1994 in *In Blood into Ink: South Asian and Middle Eastern Women Write War*. In addition, Dhan Gopal Mukherjee and some other early twentieth-century Indian American writers recorded pre-1965 experiences of South Asian migrants. The South Asian American writing proliferated at a very high rate from 1985 to the present day, informs Srikanth. A brief, but in no way exhaustive, overview of South Asian American writing includes collections like *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora* (1993); *Her Mother's Ashes and Other Stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States* (1994); *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers* (1995); *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (1996) etc.

As the number of writing by South Asian American writers proliferates, so do the awards and prizes. South Asian American writers have garnered numerous awards, including the Iowa Short Fiction Award, Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, Pulitzer, National Book Critics Circle Award, *Time magazine* selection as "top book" etc. Therefore, South Asian American

Writing has become too important a factor to be ignored in the present literary world. It can be applauded or critiqued, but its existence can no longer be overlooked.

Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri occupy significant places in South Asian American literary circles. All of them are recipients of important awards and recommendation. Not only are they all women but a major part of their literary creation revolves around women characters and feminist issues. The role of gender in diasporic identity formation –both real and fictitious–is a widely debated topic and central to many feminist discourses. So now, it will now be pertinent to discuss the role that gender plays in the identity formation of characters in South Asian diasporic literature.

(iv) Gendered Identity of Migrants

Indian diasporic literary criticism has largely given rise to a certain kind of gender perspective that applies equally to both female Indian American writers and the fictional female characters created by them. Critics such as Patricia Chu, Gita Rajan, and Shailja Sharma demarcate a divide between the literary voices of male and female diasporic writers of South Asian descent. Chu points out a "gendering" of Asian American narratives of assimilation, emanating from myriad socio-cultural issues (4). The historical restrictions on Asian women's immigration and the particular structure of Asian families have led female writers to spin different narratives of self-formation. The dominance of South Asian female writers in the diasporic space is also noteworthy.

The positioning of women as "symbols" of "landscape, society, and nation rather than active subjects" notes Chu, obstructs Asian American female writers from seeing themselves as contingent subjects in their own right (5). Additionally, women's role and work pattern in the household give them little opportunity to pursue scholarly practices to enrich their writing. They mostly express themselves as arbiters of Indian cultural tradition. While historicism, geopolitics, and imperialism are considered as the foundational bricks of writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and V. S. Naipaul, the female writers' major tropes have to do with ethnic authenticity.

Alluding to the upbringing of South Asian writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Bapsi Sidhwa, Michael Ondatjee, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and V. S. Naipaul, Gita Rajan separates them from popular front of writers like Monica Ali, Rukhsana Ahmed, Shyam

Selvadurai, Mohsin Hamid and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Rajan aligns Jhumpa Lahiri with the latter group of writers commenting that Lahiri is positioned in "an interesting historiococultural spot" that allows her writings to be read in a different way from "earlier postcolonial or diasporic authors" (123). Rajan credits Lahiri's success to her crafting of "familiar, easily recognizable characters and situations" and juxtaposing the "uncomfortable, ethical issues" (pg 124).

In the introduction to the book, *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market* Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau observe that some Indian women writers writing in English mobilize "the production, distribution and consumption" of Indian writing in English by enhancing a book's marketability (6). Domestication and exoticization of certain books are done in order to undermine the political significance of discourses like antiracialism and feminism that they contain. Belen Martin-Lucas notes how often a book's literary merits are ignored in favor of a romanticized version of its content to attract the Western reading public. Even the cover page of a book by a South Asian writer, notes Martin-Lucas, features women in traditional costume accompanied by "visual elements" of "seductive otherness" like pagodas or dragons (92). Further exoticization and objectification of women deployed for commercial purposes promote the marketing of Asian women's writing for Western publishers. Martin-Lucas observes that "publishers show a preference for those narratives that tell a woman's story of courage and defiance in an old-fashioned context of violent traditions" (91). Therefore, the marketing strategies of Indian women writers' books may call into question the literary merit of the books thereby creating jeopardy for them.

Now a question may arise here whether South Asian female writers are actually catering to the needs of Western readership's interest in the exotic representation of the East. This question is pertinent to the theme of this dissertation in the sense that the portrayal of woman characters by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and to a lesser extent, Jhumpa Lahiri has often been criticized for exoticism. Such orientalizing projects cannot be welcome to readers of South Asian descent though they may be economically viable for writers. Even the writers, no matter how successful they feel at a good reception of their works in the West, might not like the idea of selling their ethnicity in exotic form to a Western readership. To reduce the works of these writers to a mere project of orientalizing is not really fair to them. A certain mode of representation may be carried out by the publishing industry for commercial purposes. However, in no way these attempts can reduce the literary quality of the writing. Nevertheless,

the question of orientalizing inevitably gives rise to debates between real and exotic representations of South Asia in the works of diasporic writers.

The terms "real" and "exotic," as modes of representation, are growingly problematized in American national identity which can be both "paradigmatic and exceptional" (Grewal 2). As borders became more and more porous, the differences between the real and the exotic constantly diminish. The case of the United States as a transnational site is bound to give rise to questions of racism and imperialism as well. Grewal argues that the so-called globalization of the U. S. was "a will to globalization that was both profoundly cosmopolitan as well as imperial" (22). Therefore, at the end of the twentieth century, South Asian diasporic writers, including the three writers studied in the dissertation, have been criticized for producing newly gendered neocolonial subjects. For example, Jasmine from Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* has been widely censured for propagating neocolonialism. Indeed Gurleen Grewal has criticized *Jasmine* for being complicit with "the authority or ethnocentrism of the white American male" (n. pag.).

Plurality of identity is a basic argument of the present dissertation. It argues that the fictional South Asian diasporic women studied in the chapters that follow cannot be labeled as either Indian or American. They cannot also be called realistic or exotic either. They are rather a mixture of all these qualities; hence it is best to believe that they embody plural identity. The whole point made in the previous paragraph culminates in the proposition that in the context of the socio-cultural and political reality of the United States diasporic female subjects are faced with numerous challenges regarding identitarian affiliations. It is not possible for these diasporic subjects to come up only with an uncomplicated, linear identity that is solid and definable. Commenting on this multiplicity of identity of women belonging to countries outside the U.S., Judith Butler refers to Gloria Anzaldúa thus: "she says, for instance, that she is no unitary subject," that "she struggles with the complex mix of cultural traditions and formations that constitute her for what she is: Chicana, Mexican, lesbian, American, academic, poor, writer, activist" (*Undoing Gender* 227-228). The most inclusive way of defining the identity of a diasporic female subject of color is to consider "the diverse set of cultural connections that make us who we are", believes Butler (*Undoing Gender* 228). Her doubts about the different strands of formations that constitute the persona of Anzaldúa can be unified confirms this belief that the simultaneity of all these strands is the very meaning of her (Anzaldúa) identity. The same

simultaneity/plurality of identity can be observed in the fictional characters to be decoded in the coming chapters.

What Anzaldua contains in her identity is plurality. The postcolonial women as well as women of color call for recognition of their plurality as opposed to the idea of global sisterhood posed by second wave Western feminism. The identity formation of the diasporic South Asian women in the US is a complicated combination of history, race, culture, class, politics, and gender. To understand the specific situation of these diasporic women it is crucial to consider the issues of plurality in different brands of feminism. These women have to deal with problems, first as women, then as diasporic women. Obviously, this twofold identity makes things more complicated for them than their native and foreign counterparts. Any analysis of how they learn to survive in the new situation reveals that their transformation is still in process. They struggle between tradition and acculturation. However, it is clear that they are brave enough to listen to their own hearts and to eventually take their own decisions. This attitude gives them an air of independence and makes them women without any fixed boundaries. The last section of Chapter One deals with the notion of plurality and its relevance to the identity formation of some fictional diasporic women characters.

(v) Redefined Plurality as the Core Idea in Women Migrants' Identity Construction

The fictional migrant South Asian women in the United States in the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri reveal multi-hued identity formations. These writers make the characters traverse a complicated diasporic site, where they have to deal with problems first as women, then as diasporic women. Obviously, this twofold identity makes things more complicated for them than their native and foreign counterparts. The negotiation of these characters with their past and present brings out their unique quality of acculturation and retention of tradition. Because of the different historical, cultural and racial background of the South Asian women, they behave in a way unlike white Western women. The resilience that is seen in women migrants reveals distinctive feminist issues. That is why a pluralist theoretical approach is needed to understand the situation of these characters.

Traditional Western feminism has proved inadequate in understanding the socio-psychological trajectories of South Asian women migrants' lives in the US. Racial and cultural multiplicities play a crucial role in their identity formation. Branches of non-Western feminism such as postcolonial and postmodern feminism emphasize the necessity of "feminisms" over

"feminism". Their stress on plurality incorporates the particularities of feminist issues, as opposed to the universalist representation of them. These brands of feminism also stress the question of diversity among women worldwide.

Traditional Western feminism, especially second-wave feminism, refers to third world women as a homogenous, singular group. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes the representation of third world women as a "singular, monolithic" subject in Western feminist texts because this representation assumes "an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination"("Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" 51, 64). The homogenizing of women across the globe is founded on the notion of a shared oppression. This homogeneity produces a problem for the collective term "women." In her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty observes that when the term "women" denotes a discursively constructed group, the other denotation of the term is neglected, which is, women "as material subjects of their own history" ("Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" 56).Thus the discursively formulated definition undermines the "historically specific material reality of groups of women" (ibid).

The historically specific material reality of women brings forth the importance of particular local contexts in their identity formation. The questions of social class and ethnic identities cannot be bypassed in the matter of presenting third world women as distinctive group. Women do not only have gender identities; rather, they are a complex combination of socioeconomic and political factors. It is absurd to try to address the conflicting histories and diverse struggles of third world women under a single rubric. Therefore, the idea of "universal sisterhood" coined by Robin Morgan (1996), instead of being universal, becomes a particular self-presentation of Western women (1).

Postcolonial feminists also raise questions about the Western campaign of homogeneity of women issues across the globe. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (2003) opine that feminist anti-racist politics was born out of "recognition of the differences between women and out of the anti-imperialist campaigns of 'first-' and 'third-world' women" (4). This recognition, being intricately related to postcolonial awakenings, can be considered an offshoot of the larger ideological backdrop of anti-imperialism in formerly colonized countries. As a part of this legacy, feminism in South Asia is naturally more prone to plurality and differences.

In the introduction of *South Asian Feminisms*, its editors, Ania Loomba and Ritty A Lukose (2012), explain the title of the anthology by saying that "there are necessarily enormous debates and divergences between feminists in the region and beyond, that we used the word "feminisms" in the book's title and in this introduction" (2). Plurality and differences in feminist theories emphasize the necessity of specific scrutiny of regional and individual study of women. Ratna Kapur and Mrinaliny Sinha argue for reconsidering Eurocentric ethnographic and historical works in the context of South Asia to see whether the specifities of South Asia yield alternative views of the conceptual categories of gender and sexuality. Sinha prefers the idea of "rethinking" gender "in the light of different locations" (357). Later in the essay, she narrows down the different locations to South Asian contexts. The postcolonial feminist discourse thus coins the concept of plurality against the backdrop of a global, universal idea of feminist criticism that tends to overlook the racial and regional factors related to women issues.

As is evident in the previous paragraphs, the plural identity of South Asian diasporic women can be expounded with the help of postcolonial feminist theory and postmodern feminist theory. Indeed, following the footprints of postcolonial feminists, postmodern feminists emphasize the particularity of subjects instead of a universality that tends to generalize women's issues all over the world. As a postmodern feminist, Linda Hutcheon clarifies her position in defining postmodern feminism as the plural term "feminisms" in an interview (21).

In her *Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"* Judith Butler states that "In the early 1980s, the feminist "we" rightly came under attack by women of color who claimed that the "we" was invariably white, and this "we" that was meant to solidify the movement was the very source of a painful factionalization" (*Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"*15). She further adds that now it is time "to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear" (16). About her notion of postmodernism, Butler says, "I don't know what postmodernism is, but I do have some sense of what it might mean to subject notions of the body and materiality to a deconstructive critique" (17). A deconstructive critique involves going beyond traditional factions and categories in order to create new ones−which are appropriate to explicate the plural identity of the fictional characters studied in this dissertation.

Another postmodern critic Linda J. Nicholson says in *Feminism/Postmodernism* "Feminist theorists have not attempted, by and large, the construction of cross-cultural theories of the true, the just or the beautiful" (5). She further adds that "from otherness and difference an identity can be constructed that embraces a recognition of the multiple and contradictory aspects of both our individual and collective identities" (12). Clearly, a postmodern feminist like her celebrates diversity among women across the globe. Thus, this brand of feminism becomes an appropriate site for accommodating issues of diasporic women.

However, the rigid opposition between the first and third world, between Western feminism and feminism of color, is no longer tenable in the fast-moving present-day world of global capitalism. A new kind of solidarity/ reconciliation between Western and third world feminism is perhaps needed to resist the new type of masculinist and racist politics that is now growing with global capitalism. In the book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* Chandra Talpade Mohanty observes that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism lie beneath and stimulate social and political institutions of rule and thereby often "lead to hatred of women and (supposedly justified) violence against women. The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen to be" (*Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* 3). The plurality of South Asian feminism now has to be redefined in the light of the changed socio-economic politics of the modern world. Mohanty makes some very insightful propositions in her essay as to how solidarity might be achieved between the plural third world and white Western feminism.

Apart from Mohanty, some other feminist thinkers also suggest a likelihood of reconciliation among the diversity of feminisms. This kind of reconciliation is sometimes necessary for third world feminism since a polarity between white and third world feminism may lead to another kind of stalemate. Third world feminism cannot be presented as a homogenous block of plurality in contrast to Western, white, middle-class feminism. Overemphasizing plurality makes one runs the risk of being interpreted as exotic. bell hooks refers to this risk by saying that "the commodification of difference," is the representation of diversity as a form of exotica, "a spice, seasoning that livens up the dull dish that is main-stream white culture"(21). Thus the emancipation of South Asian women migrants, if analyzed only by considering the notion of plurality, may lead any study of the problem to a dead end. It seems that a

reconciliatory approach, one that assimilates both white and third world feminisms, is the best course to be pursued to understand the new women of the first and second-generation South Asian diaspora. In her essay "U.S. Third World Feminism: The theory and method of oppositional consciousness in the postmodern world" Chela Sandoval (2009) talks about a possible alliance between white and third world feminisms. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (1996) point out the limitations of the study of plurality in feminism by saying that this branch of feminism often fails to reach a deeper level because of its failure to attend to the power relations that accompany difference.

Since third world feminist discourse is prone to misinterpretation, the addition of some other strands of thought may give it the desired meaning. Linda Alcoff (1988) agrees with the idea that the term "woman of color" itself is self-contradictory as it "reinforces the significance of that which should have no significance—skin color" (436). To reach an inclusive approach all types of feminisms should go through a process of reinterpretation and reconstruction. Alcoff suggests that new form of theorization has to be proposed "within the process of reinterpreting our position, and reconstructing our political identity, as women and feminists in relation to the world and to one another" (436). If Alcoff's suggestion can be applied to the analysis of South Asian migrant women's negotiation with the West, two objectives can be achieved: their plurality will merit attention as will their merger with the West.

An inclusive approach that addresses both third world and white feminism with equal importance will surely generate a healthy and balanced theory for women around the world. This kind of approach is the fittest one to describe the new women characters of Mukherjee, Banerjee, and Lahiri. Revisiting her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" Chandra Talpade Mohanty remarks that: "I did not write "Under Western Eyes" as a testament to the impossibility of egalitarian and noncolonizing cross-cultural scholarship, nor did I define "Western" and "Third World" feminism in such oppositional ways that there would be no possibility of solidarity between Western and Third World feminists" (**"**Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles" 5). This is a kind of self-defense on the part of Mohanty against some critics' over generalization of some terms she used in the original essay. This re-visioning of the essay also clarifies some of Mohanty's opinions that invoked a much-heated debate. One of these misunderstood notions is

about solidarity among feminisms across borders, the possibility of which Mohanty articulates in a very optimistic way.

The solidarity she envisions is based on "noncolonization". To achieve it, one has to get rid of "unequal power relations among feminists" (503-504). She also thinks that it is easier to recognize "connections and commonalities" by knowing the "differences and particularities" across and between borders because no border is rigid, but fluid (505). Mohanty adeptly coins two striking phrases, "micropolitics" and "macropolitics", in her later essay to define the particular and the global sites of culture, economy, and politics (509). Mohanty opines that in the present world the politics of capitalist economy has become the locus of female struggle, replacing Eurocentrism. Consequently, the discursive opposition now is not between the West and the third world; rather, it is between the micropolitics of everyday life and the macropolitics of global economic and political processes (509). Mohanty goes on to prove that global capitalism perpetuates masculinist and racist values and transnational feminist practice can oppose this trend. Towards the end of the essay, she suggests that a transnational feminist practice depends on "building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief and so on" (530).

The combination of Western and third world feminist issues can be beneficial in addressing the questions related to the identity formation of migrant women who are caught between the two worlds. Since feminist theories have originated in the West, it is imperative to recall them while dealing with feminist issues. However, it is impossible to think only in terms of binaries in the present world of overlapping of cultures, moral values, and epistemological substances. Hence a combined approach of Western theories, along with their tailored forms suited to the case of women from different race, class, and ethnicities, is required to address feminist issues across the globe. Thus solidarity, inclusive of plurality, is obtainable within the epistemological frame of feminism.

This chapter has discussed the term "diaspora" before narrowing down its scope to South Asian contexts. Since this dissertation focuses on three Indian writers and their migrant characters, one section of this chapter deals with Indian diasporic history. It also discusses the development of Indian English writing after the country's Independence.The history of Indian diasporic writing and its critique has also been discussed elaborately in it. The controversy around diasporic writing as well as the applause it receives is also part of this chapter. The role

of gender in the identity formation of migrants and different branches of feminism were also noted. The best possible theoretical approach to be taken in analyzing the characters under discussion was also considered.

Having discussed the background of Indian diasporic writing and the role of gender in the formation of migrants' identity, the dissertation will now concentrate on the development of the three writers leading diasporic lives. Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, are of Indian origin and have all settled down in the USA. The next chapters will focus on how diaspora has moulded the psyche of these writers, and how they infuse their fictional women characters' lives with their own experiences, adjustments, negotiation, and resilience.

Chapter Two

Identity Formation of South Asian Diasporic Women: Connecting Postcolonial and Postmodern Feminism with Diasporic Studies

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The previous chapter considered the fictional lives of some diasporic women from postcolonial and postmodern feministic viewpoints to understand their disposition in more concrete ways. The argument built in the last portion of the first chapter suggests that solidarity between Western and third world feminism was desirable. Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri weave their narratives around some remarkable female characters who defy traditional categorization. To decipher the behavioral pattern of these female characters amalgamation of these two strands of feminist theories is needed. Before going into a textual analysis of these characters, it is crucial to look into their discursive subject positions. To that end, the second chapter of the dissertation will look at the issues of diasporic identity formation, using postcolonial and postmodern feminist theories to throw light on characters that contain traces of all these three discourses.

Chapter Two is divided into five sections in order to discuss the theories of postcolonial and postmodern feminism and diasporic female identity formation. Since the ultimate purpose of the dissertation is to map the identity formation of some fictional South Asian women characters, the theoretical discussion carried out here centers around the formation of identity. The question of identity formation is a very complicated one and is based on the plethora of theories and debates surrounding it. Therefore, this chapter first discusses how the question of identity formation has been problematized. Then it attempts to analyze how notions of identity are articulated in postcolonial and postmodern feminism. The issue of diasporic identity formation is analyzed in the last section of Chapter Two. Chapter Three, Four and Five document the textual rendition of character development in Mukherjee, Divakaruni, and Lahiri with continual reference to the theories discussed in the present chapter.

How a South Asian female identity is formed in the diasporic space of the United States depends largely on the character's historical and cultural background. However, female identities undergo various kinds of mutations to adapt to diasporic space. For an in-depth analysis of such

a character, on one hand, a diasporic woman's historical identity as a postcolonial subject is important; on the other hand, the fluidity of her character, that is, her ability to adapt, has a strong postmodern bent to it, and is also relevant in this context. Therefore, the apparently contradictory currents that mould a diasporic South Asian female's character will be considered in the theoretical interpretations of this chapter.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

i) Identity Formation; ii) Points of Convergence between Postcolonialism and Postmodernism; iii) Postcolonial Feminism; iv) Postmodern Feminism; v) Diasporic Female Identity.

(i) Identity Formation:

The concept of 'identity' can be a contested one not only because it has been explained in many ways, but also because the very notion of 'identity' has been questioned persistently in discursive practices. Identity has been conceived in opposite terms. Whereas there is an 'essentialist' notion of identity that claims that identity can be determined according to one's 'essence'; 'deconstruction' dismisses the possibility of such a unifying concept.

In her introduction to the book *Reclaiming Identity*, Paula M. L. Moya defines "essence" as "a basic, unvariable, and presocial nature"(7). Usually, essentialism tends to see one's social category (class, gender, race, sexuality, etc.) "as determinate in the last instance for the cultural identity of the individual or group in question"(ibid). Therefore, essentialism voices the concept of a fixed and determinable identity which has a particular historical, social and cultural background. However, the opposition to this view of identity is the core concern of deconstruction.

Deconstruction, holds Stuart Hall, is "critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity"(2). The process of identity formation has been an important part of psychoanalytically-influenced feminism, cultural criticism, and postmodernism. Since identities are constructed within discourse, Hall stresses the need to "understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices"(4).

Because modalities of power play a key role in the construction of identity, difference and exclusion play a more active part in its formation rather than sameness and inclusion.

Gender, as part of discourse, and one of the most effective tools of power, plays a key role in identity formation. In the formation of national identities, gender relations have always been crucial markers. Ania Loomba and Suvir Kaul discuss the role of gender in the evolution of national identities by noting how women are identified as "a crucial 'site' upon which battles are waged between tradition and modernity, or between nationalism and colonialism, or indeed between different nationalisms" (7). This symbolizing of a particular gender perpetuates the discrimination between the two parts of a population. Equating women with tradition and nationality limits their participation in economic and developmental activities, thereby giving men an advantageous position over them.

Since this dissertation studies Indian women in diasporic space, it is important for the sake of understanding their disposition, to observe how they have been treated in their own countries. In the Indian political context, from the early post-independence years, both right-wing fundamentalists and the left have "all offered their versions of 'good womanhood', which are far from identical, but which have all utilized the rhetoric of India versus the West"(Loomba and Kaul 8). Women's organizations in the country either do not comply with, or directly oppose, this disposition. They have chosen to avoid this debate altogether. However, at present, an analysis of this issue has become inevitable in understanding the identity formation of postcolonial Indian women.

The tendency of studying colonial subjects as "undifferentiated by class, caste or gender" problematizes the identity formation of Indian women as postcolonial subjects (Loomba and Kaul 8-9). The analysis of colonial subjects in India as oppressed and resisting only within the colonial space overlooks the complicated situation of local women during that period. Both a patriarchal social frame and the colonial regime subjugated women in colonial India. Nevertheless, many of them worked as active agents against the colonial regime. It is important to understand this two-fold identity of colonial Indian women as both victims and agents to define their new roles as subjects in the postcolonial era.

In postcolonial India, the question of widow immolation, 'sati', or the burning of the Hindu wife on her husband's pyre, has been at the centre of the debate concerning women's role as agents or victims. Loomba and Kaul give their views on this issue thus:

> The Hindu wife's burning on her husband's pyre has, both historically and in contemporary politics, been a superconductor for contentious debates about tradition and modernity, Hindu/Indian/indigenous culture versus westernization, colonialism and post-coloniality, textuality and culture, normative versus deviant womanhood, and above all, female agency versus female victimization. (9)

What Loomba and Kaul point to here is that the willing immolation of the widow shows how patriarchal ideologies coalesce with feminist agendas across geographical and cultural locations. In the context of such agendas, it is impossible to resort to any fixed idea of identity that is clearly differentiable from other strands of binaries. The suitable way to understand the process of identity formation of postcolonial Indian women is to apply poststructuralist perspectives on decentered subjects. Loomba and Kaul emphasize the need to combine a number of approaches to describe the identity of postcolonial Indian female subjects. They note the need to combine postmodern theories of unstable subjectivities and politically fragmented identities with the explication of human action to find out the underlying cause of the contradictory behavior of female subjects. The seemingly contradictory ideas of "decentered subjectivity" and "fissured (political) identities" are the very essence of the mutable subjectivity of postcolonial women (Loomba and Kaul 10).

The contradictory identity of postcolonial women leads to further divisions such as western and third world feminisms. According to Loomba and Kaul, there is a perpetual division between western feminism and third world or native feminism. A dismissal of western feminism and a branding of it as "homogenizing" might be easy, but an uncomplicated acceptance of the latter also runs the risk of entangling in a "double bind of being either nativist or colonialist" (Loomba and Kaul 12). That is, advocates of third world feminism run the risk of being branded as materializing nativists or people with colonialist agendas. Even Gayatri Spivak, who is recognized both in the west and the third world, opine Loomba and Kaul, is caught within this double bind (12).

To analyze postcolonial identity as decentered and fissured, feminists can resort to a perpetual oscillation between the west and the third world. In this case, according to Loomba and Kaul, diasporic subjects have an edge over their compatriots at home because of their experience of migration. The experience of migration or exile makes diasporic subjects, at least when compared to their compatriots at home, more authentic representatives of fissured identities to the western academy. Therefore, the accounts of the experiences diasporic subjects uphold to the western academy are accepted as the true version of the postcolonial identity of South Asian people. Loomba and Kaul note that a "more creative space" is secured for diasporic postcolonials in the western academy. Compared to postcolonial intellectuals that work in the third world, diasporic people are considered to be politically more interesting. One reason behind this conviction is the diasporic experience as seen by the west as "emblematic of the fissured identities posited by post-structuralist theory," that is, diasporic identities represent the felt experiences of colonized people (Loomba and Kaul 13). According to Loomba and Kaul, because of this assimilation of diasporic and fissured consciousness, the state of diaspora becomes the fittest milieu of postcoloniality (ibid).

However, the tendency of considering diasporic community as homogenous and bringing them under the spectrum of "postcolonial intellectuals" is problematic since diasporic postcolonials belong to different classes and ideologies. Nevertheless, western academy and institutions are persistent in their view of postcolonial societies as "more similar than dissimilar" (Loomba and Kaul 15), and the notion post-coloniality as akin to experience of identities which are dual, fissured and hyphenated (ibid). For the purpose of this dissertation, defining postcolonial identities will be so as having similarities, but not without the pluralities intertwined with them. In fact, it is an inclusive and broad connotation of the term 'postcolonial identity' that allows us to focus on plurality in spite of the semblances postcolonial South Asian subjects share, especially when occupying diasporic space.

Having given a brief introduction to postcolonial identity formation it is necessary now to say a few words about identity formation in the light of postmodernism. Before doing so, to clarify the idea of postmodern identity, I would like to introduce the "postpositivist" theory that questions the postmodern concept of identity formation. Postpositivist theory attempts to establish the significance of cultural and historical factors in the process of identity formation. Postmodernism, as part of its skepticism about the importance of history and culture, tend to

deflate the influence of these factors in an individual's identity formation. The purpose of introducing the postpositivist theory is to suggest that postmodernism, in spite of its skepticism about the importance of history and culture, believes in individual identity formations.

Postmodernism, as a theory, accords with uncertainty and fragmentation. The whole idea of identity faces a huge question mark when brought under its scrutinizing eye. Shari Stone-Mediatore gives an enlightening account of the postmodern idea of identity in the following words:

> Postmodernism speaks to our sense of the contingency of seemingly "universal" truths, our exposure to a plurality of perspectives on ethics and history, and our experience of not quite fitting into any single identity. (126)

Since universal truths, ethics, and history are all subject to contingency, nothing is fixed in the postmodern world, including identity, which depends on ideas of history and culture. Paula M. L. Moya, in her introduction to the book *Reclaiming Identity,* defines the postmodernist notion of identity as opposed to identity construction based on essentialism. Moya explains that the limitations of essentialist conceptions of identity inspired cultural critics to the postmodern notion of deconstruction. Cultural critics embrace postmodernist deconstruction of identity as a progressive alternative to essentialist identity (Moya, *Reclaiming Identity* 4).

However, Moya and the other authors of *Reclaiming Identity* put forward a "post-Enlightenment" theory to criticize loopholes they discover in postmodernism. The authors of this anthology reclaim identity by presenting some criticism on the postmodern skepticism of universal truths. For example, they argue that a more truthful representation of the world is not possible if we view all truth-claims as equally unreliable. Responsible politics, committed to social justice, does not stand a chance if we see moral norms as mere conventions. The most powerful argument these theorists put forward is we cannot address our demands and repressions as members having a specific social group identity, when we do not believe identities to be real (Stone-Mediatore 126).

In the wake of such dilemma, 'post-Enlightenment' theorists attempt to mediate a middle ground between postmodern uncertainty and the stability of some solid beliefs like responsible politics and 'historically grounded communities.' They hold that in spite of our uncertainty we still need "publicly accountable knowledge and politics, as well as historically anchored

identities" (Stone-Mediatore 126). They agree with the postmodern view of absence of universal principles, but they want to substitute it with responsible politics. In the same way, they want to stabilize the notion of identity by claiming historically grounded communities, "notwithstanding …[their] heterogeneous roots" (ibid).

Feminist epistemologists, like other identity-specific groups, are concerned with struggle for social changes. To locate oppression and to struggle for social change, it is crucial to learn how the world actually operates. However, poststructuralist scholars, in their dismissal of the processes of identification, problematize the formation of identity-specific groups, thereby making it difficult for feminists to voice their demands. On the other hand, there is an essentialist notion of identity that tends to treat identities as discrete, naturally existing units.

In response to the inadequacy of both essentialist and poststructuralist approaches to identity, the authors of *Reclaiming Identity* argue for a positivist realist theory that avoids essentializing identity but holds it as something solid, and having importance in our everyday life (Stone-Mediatore 129). The authors realize the futility of celebrating abstract difference or sameness devoid of historically specific structural relations. However, the process of identity formation, involving specific cultural and historical structures, is not without the risk of empowering one group at the expense of another.

Keeping in mind these complexities around identity formation, *Reclaiming Identity* seeks a departure from postmodernist critiques of all kinds of reliable knowledge. However, it does not want to return to an uncritical, naïve belief in the possibility of theoretically unmediated knowledge. The authors in the book attempt to prove that in spite of its claim of standing against all types of universalizing, postmodernists "reinscribe, albeit unintentionally, a kind of universalizing sameness (we are all marginal now!) that their celebration of "difference" had tried so hard to avoid"(Moya, "Postmodernism, "Realism," and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism" 68).

In her essay "Postmodernism, "Realism," and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism" Moya considers the case of chicana/o women whose identities are relational as they are grounded in social groups rooted in history that determine social locations ("Postmodernism, "Realism," and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism"). Their identities do not fit in the concept of identity prescribed by postmodernism within U. S. literary and cultural studies. Feminists who uphold the traditional postmodernist

view of identity as "inherently and perniciously "foundational"," will fail to understand the role of historically produced social categories that determine the particular identity of a particular group of women (ibid).

According to Moya, postpositive realist theory, as opposed to postmodern theory, claims that categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality determine an individual's social location. This is often causally related to experiences she will have. Since postmodernists such as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway tend to disregard the role of history and culture in the making of one's identity, postpositivists attempt to establish the significance of these factors in the process of identity formation.

If we analyze Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser's writing on the encounter between feminism and postmodernism, we realize that what postpositivists criticize as a gap between postmodernist concepts of identity and its surrounding reality is actually reconcilable. In her introduction to *Feminism/ Postmodernism* Nicholson opines that adoption of a carefully constructed postmodernism will enable feminists to reconcile historical and postmodern approaches (9). I quote liberally from Nicholson to indicate what she deems to be "a carefully constructed postmodernism"

> As Nancy Fraser and I argue, postmodernism need not demand the elimination of all big theory, much less theory *per se*, to avoid totalization and essentialism. The key is to identify types of theorizing which are inimical to essentialism. Thus, theorizing which is explicitly historical, that is, which situates its categories within historical frameworks, less easily invites the dangers of false generalizations than does theorizing which does not. (9)

As is evident from the above, postmodernism does not negate all theories; all it attempts to do is avoid totalization and essentialism. It approves of historical theorizing since such theorizing is less likely to inculcate false generalizations. Therefore, it will not be incorrect to say that postmodern feminist identity can be built on any notion of difference that is historically grounded. This point is elaborated in the fourth section of the chapter.

Before moving on to postcolonial and postmodern feminism, a brief account of the convergences between postcolonialism and postmodernism will be given here as a prelude. This

account is theoretical, not literary, and limited to a number of pieces selected from work done on the aforementioned theories.

(ii) Points of Convergence between Postcolonialism and Postmodernism

Postcolonial and postmodern enterprises are divergent in terms of origin, expression, and purpose. Both postcolonial and postmodern theories are difficult to pin down, as both have a number of subsets and divergent views and counter views. Helen Tiffin regards postcolonial writing and reading practices as things taking place outside Europe but bearing signs of European expansion and exploitation. Postcolonial discourse is invariably about colonial experiences. Tiffin underscores the contrast between postcolonialism and postmodernism by noting that the latter follows established European and North American ideas even when the theory is practiced or applied outside these spaces in other parts of the world. She observes that though there are some stylistic similarities between the two theories, they are "energized by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations" (Tiffin 172). About the stylistic similarities between postcolonial and postmodern writing, Tiffin notes that they use allegory and metaphor and avoid closure and attack "on binary structuration of concept and language…" (ibid). Tiffin thereby indicates that the intersection between the two projects is stylistic and not inherent.

Roger Berger sums up postmodernism as a textual practice and a subcultural style or fashion, upholding western postindustrial culture. For him, postcolonialism is "a geographical site, an existential condition, a political reality, a textual practice, and the emergent or dominant global culture (or counter-culture)" (n.pag.). Postcolonialism and postmodernism hold irreconcilable positions due to the fundamental differences that exist between the larger contexts of their origination.

In spite of the clear divergences between them, postcolonialism and postmodernism have some parallel stylistic features, as Tiffin and Berger indicate. Berger recognizes that there are many parallel elements between these theories though he clearly declares that despite having "theoretical valence", these parallels have no great significance, as the projects are fundamentally different in their philosophies and purposes (n.pag.).

Canadian literary and art critic Linda Hutcheon traces some formal, thematic and strategic overlaps between the postmodern and the postcolonial. She notes that both make use of

magic realism to resist totalizing systems. Both use parody to reconnect with the past. Whereas postmodernism questions and debates with the past using parody, the postcolonial uses parody specifically to deal with the tyrannical weight of the imperial past. However, in spite of the different purposes that guide them, both recognize the historical, political and social circumstances of events. The postmodern and the postcolonial both use irony as a trope of doubleness. The "contradictions" and "heterogeneous dualities" that build the postcolonial experience coincide with postmodern "multiplicity" and "paradoxes"("Circling the Downspout of Empire": Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism"163).These dualities inherent in the postmodern and the postcolonial are aptly expressed with the help of irony.

There is another point of convergence between postcolonialism and postmodernism, which implies their common liaison with the feminist theories that emerged after the 1970s and 1980s. Avtar Brah considers modernist theoretical foundation to be dependent on liberalism and Marxism, drawn from European Enlightenment, informing the background of feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s. However, postmodernism reviewed Enlightenment ideologies as part of its criticism of metanarratives. In this critique postmodernism is not alone, as there is a legacy of the critique "within anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist critical practice" (Brah, "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality" 82).Therefore, the common thread against Enlightenment ideologies that runs through postmodernism is also evident in anticolonialism and feminism.

Since this dissertation utilizes a combined theoretical frame of postcolonial and postmodern feminism, it is necessary for me at this stage to clarify whether it reconciles these two projects−the postmodern and the postcolonial or not. The point that needs to be made here is that the superficial convergences of the two projects do not suggest any commonality between their origins and purpose. The semblances between them are stylistic and have nothing to do with ideology. It is true that some of the issues these two movements deal with are compatible, but they are applied to very different ends. Likewise, this dissertation draws on postcolonial and postmodern feminism as two distinctly separate tropes in analyzing diasporic South Asian women characters in the texts of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri. It does not intend to tie the two projects together. Nonetheless, like the sameness that exists between the postcolonial and the postmodern, their feminist branches too have few points of convergences. The next chapter introduces the idea of postcolonial feminism to show how this subject is significant in the study of fictional South Asian women characters in diasporic space.

(iii) Postcolonial Feminism:

Postcolonial feminism reconfigures history and neocolonialism by tagging them with feminist issues. It revisits colonial history to view women as preservers of national identity. How this attribution of tradition on women obstructs the development of their empowerment as a group is also a concern of postcolonial feminism. It also studies the role of neocolonial enterprises in the fettering of women. As a part of its critique of neocolonialism, postcolonial feminism unmasks the double standard maintained in certain diasporic spaces to subjugate women.

Apart from history and neocolonialism, postcolonial feminism is also concerned with a number of projects one of which is relevant to this dissertation. Since it focuses on the concept of 'race' in prevailing feminist discourse. I now illustrate how and why the inclusion of race in mainstream feminist discourse is a quintessential part of postcolonial feminism. Its negotiation with history and neocolonialism is discussed towards the end of this section.

In the introduction to *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* the editors Reina Lewis and Sara Mills critique the overgeneralization of feminist issues across the world by proponents of second wave Anglo-American feminist theory. Considering white middle-class women's experiences, second wave feminists have developed a theory of global sisterhood. Lewis and Mills note,"[t]his type of essentialising led to a silencing of Black and third world women's interventions within early Anglo-American feminist theory" (4). Critics like Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich forcefully proffer their dissatisfaction about this kind of premeditated racial and ethnical ideology of second-wave feminists. In her vibrant essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" Lorde observes that white feminists have achieved relatively privileged position over Black women and women of colour within a patriarchal status quo. She comments that white feminists are ironically perpetuating patriarchal ideologies by failing to understand differences among women. As she observes:

> The failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must

become define and empower. ("The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" 27)

Lorde's proposition of changing 'divide and conquer' into 'define and empower' is actually an attempt to face, rather than evade difference and build interdependency among women across the globe. An interdependent community would not require ignoring differences; rather, it finds strength in differences. Lorde believes that such a community should require neither discarding differences nor pretending that there is no such thing among women. Lorde justifiably thinks that the representation of Black and third world women in feminist academic conferences is not enough to give feminist movement an inclusive format. She encourages fellow activists to see difference among women as a power that enables them to explore the profundity of knowledge in order to achieve a pure vision of their future. According to Lorde, difference is the fundamental and significant connection from which each woman can empower herself.

Postcolonial feminism's concern about racial difference has also found voice in the writings of other critics. Lorde's words are in harmony with Reina Lewis and Sara Mills who note "[f]eminist anti-racist politics was born out of recognition of the differences between women and out of the anti-imperialist campaigns of 'first-' and 'third-world' women" (4). The insertion of anti-racism and anti-imperialist campaigns in feminism is the hallmark of postcolonial feminism. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's seminal essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" also brings up the issue of racial differences while reviewing the hegemonic nature of Western feminisms. However, the 'interdependency' advocated by Lorde is hinted at, but not clearly present in Mohanty's initial essay. However, this issue of accommodation and merging appears explicitly in Mohanty's later essay ""Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles."

One major concern of Mohanty's first essay is to critique Western feminists' monolithic representation of third world women, specifically in the Zed Press "Women in the Third World" series. According to her, this process of reducing women of colour to a single entity by ignoring their individual differences is a colonizing project of white feminists. Mohanty argues that some feminist writings discursively colonize "the material and historical heterogeneities" of third world women's lives to represent a monolithic image of them under the label "third world

woman". This labeling, opines Mohanty, "carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" ("Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" 53).

Here Mohanty refers to a kind of colonizing project of Western feminist theory when it fails to recognize racial, cultural and historical differences among third world women. She widens the horizon of her study firstly by pointing out that women across the globe are defined as a monolithic group having identical interests and desires beyond class, race, and ethnicity. Secondly, Mohanty critiques the oversimplified and uncritical way in which the universality and cross-cultural validity of the homogeneity of women is upheld in works of Zed Press Women in the Third World series. Thirdly, she uncovers the political presupposition underlying the methodologies and analytical strategies involved in the representation of women.

The three stages of the process in which third world women are represented as a monolithic entity result in creating a binary opposition between third and first world women. This process culminates in the image of a stereotypical third world woman leading a life of deprivation because of her gender. Mohanty explicates that whereas the third world woman is depicted as sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented and victimized, the western woman depicts herself as educated, modern, having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to take their own decisions (ibid). This contrasting picture is the proof of the colonizing process of third world women by Western feminists.

What Western white feminists do in representing third world women is termed as "cultural reductionism" by Mohanty, though actually apart from culture it also involves historical, political and economic reductionism (66). When the term "women" is used as a group, as a stable category of analysis, observes Mohanty, "it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination" ("Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" 64). This kind of generalization eschews an analytical study of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts. In fact, this kind of reductionist categorization limits women only to their gender identity, without paying any heed to their class, race, and ethnicity (ibid). Mohanty argues that when women are characterized as a group based only on their gender defined sociologically, it points towards a monolithic notion of sexual difference between men and women, thereby perpetuating the oppression meted out to them by patriarchy (ibid).

Mohanty compares the authorizing disposition of Western feminist writings on women and the project of humanism in general. She defines humanism as "a Western ideological and political project which involves the necessary recuperation of the "East" and "Woman" as Others" (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" 73). This othering of women and the east by humanism places men and the west at the centre. The marginalization of women and the East is a colonizing agenda imposed on third world women by white Western feminists.

Mary E. John focuses on another aspect of postcolonial feminism in her book *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory, and Postcolonial Histories*. She discusses in it the function and contingency of third world feminists residing in the first world. According to her, "[t]he anthropological imperative to translate other cultures for the West can turn postcolonial feminists into "third-world women" for first- world agendas" (John 2). To understand third world feminists better, she thinks that the alternate theorizations of divergences and connections between feminists in the United States and India need more analytical study. Many third world peoples have been heading westward before and after decolonization. The women among them, comments John, including feminists, when go and settle in the west, and encounter issues that cannot be explained or understood from the universal standpoint of international feminism (16).

John hereby alludes to the unique position of third world women who migrate and reside in the West. Unless they are prepared to accommodate the divergences of third world feminism, Western feminists will fail to understand it fully. Concerning India, she contends that during the post−independence era, major changes took place in the country's institutions, structures, and terminologies of modernization, progress, and secularism. She explains how the changed scenario transformed the life of Indian women:

> These provided a space for some middle-class women to articulate themselves beyond the confines of prior constructs of "tradition" and especially to take advantage of the mobilities of education. (10)

She puts forward the duality of tradition and modernity in the personality of the middle class by saying that academic women, born after independence, carry within them a combined heritage of modernity and tradition (10).

John believes that to understand the psychology of Eastern women a new language, one other than the presumed or proposed international feminism, is required. She suggests that the concept of postcolonial feminism can take the place of that new feminist language (ibid).

In *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan criticize "global feminism" by noting that it is one of the universalizing gestures of "dominant Western cultures" and "Western cultural imperialism" (*Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist* 17). They underscore the point by noting that global feminism eludes the plurality of women's agency for the sake of the western concept of women's liberation. Such a notion upholds individuality and modernity as opposed to diversity (ibid). Anti-imperialist movements and women who are involved in decolonizing efforts refuse the idea of global feminism in favour of a movement that takes into consideration differences of class, race or other ethnic, religious or regional struggles of women around the world (ibid). Grewal and Kaplan's stance agrees with that of other postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty, Lorde, Lewis, and Mills, all of whom have been mentioned earlier in this chapter.

However, we find another striking factor in Grewal and Kaplan's writing that connects the idea of postcolonial feminism with the idea of diaspora. These authors define postcolonial studies, postcolonial feminism included, as an analysis of literary productions by first World subjects to find out and resist "a centre/margin dichotomy that situates the "postcolonial" as geographically and culturally "other"" (*Scattered Hegemonies:*15). They further define postcolonialism from the perspective of a third world that refuses orientalism and criticizes nativism. Thus postcolonial studies transgress borders and the term "postcolonial" "can thus serve as a term that positions cultural production in the fields of transnational economic relations and diasporic identity constructions" (ibid).

Grewal and Kaplan believe that postcolonial diasporas complicate the center-periphery idea mentioned in the above paragraph in the sense that transnational circulation of populations has made it difficult for us to understand the mobility of information and capital, along with the movements of people among and through different countries of the present world. The authors use the term "transnational scattered hegemonies" to identify the complicated power relations between postcolonial diasporic people and the first world (*Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity*

and Transnational Feminist 17). Without a thorough understanding of power relations that may otherwise be dormant in gender issues, comment Grewal and Kaplan, feminist movements run the risk of repeating universalizing traits of western cultures (ibid). The authors hold that not only economic relations are being destabilized in the present world, but also intellectual practice such as the establishment of theories has now become an exchangeable thing. For example, they mention the theories of Homi Bhabha, which emerge from both Indian contexts and Indian diaspora in England but have been adopted by some U.S. mainstream theorists.

It is in this light that one can conclude that postcolonial feminism, when studied in accordance with diaspora, further destabilizes the idea of the universality of Western cultures by making us aware of the circular power relationships between the first and third worlds. Because of diasporic movements, economic and intellectual properties are being exchanged between the first and third worlds. Identities are contaminated in the global context to such an extent that the centrality of Western culture is now questionable. Hence, postcolonial feminism's emphasis on plurality of race, culture and other defining agencies is more apparent in the diaspora.

Rajeswary Sunder Rajan and You-me Park compare diaspora and postcolonial study when they observe that the presence of immigrants in Britain, Europe, and the United States is a result of direct and indirect imperialism (59). It is therefore natural that in mainstream postcolonial theory discussions of diaspora, exile, borderlands, hybrid identities, and cosmopolitanism have been included lately. Another interesting observation of Rajan and Park is that feminists have raised their voice against discriminatory immigration laws and "other forms of state racism" which have eluded the attention of both the liberal democratic welfare state and first world feminisms (59).

Rajan and Park have coined the idea of "transnational feminism" alongside postcolonial feminism in order to broaden the horizon of the latter (57). Transnational feminism resists the labeling of third world women as victims. At the same time, it shares postcolonial feminism's main issues, interests, and political agendas because transnational feminism is closely concerned with neocolonialism, the successor of colonialism (ibid).

As part of its critique of neocolonialism, transnational and postcolonial feminisms gesture at sexist aspects of British and US immigration laws, as well as the sexist practices within women's own communities. Because of these laws, women face this two edged–problem of

patriarchal communities and the racist state. These women are vulnerable to exploitation at the work place and violence at home. Inside the community or home, women also have to deal with the pressure of conforming to the model of traditionally and culturally determined roles that uphold their national identities. Rajan and Park quote postcolonial feminist historians to substantiate their argument about using women as upholders of national ideals. In this regard, they refer to Lata Mani's essays on colonial history "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India" which builds its argument about the representation of women based on the question of 'sati'. Mani argues that the debate on sati did not include women as an active agent in spite of their being crucial to it. The debate was between "colonial officials and indigenous reformers" on the one hand, and "traditionalists on the other," and women were merely the "ground" in it (qtd. in Rajan and Park 61). Rajan and Park underscore Mani's observation by stressing that it points out the place of women not only in that particular circumstance of 'sati' but also in other colonial and postcolonial contexts where there is conflict between tradition and modernity (ibid).

As is evident in the previous paragraph, postcolonial feminism interprets history as part of its inquiry into how the demands of nationalism and feminism have interacted over time. In fact, history plays a significant role in shaping the context of many previously colonized countries. In their essay, Rajan and Park note how "cultural nationalism" has been used as a powerful tool of resistance by postcolonial countries against colonization, especially by those that are situated in South Asia and West Asia (63). Rajan and Park interpret cultural nationalism as "a valorization of the past, the resurrection of religious symbols, the assertion of pride in indigenous languages, literatures," which was "mobilized in anticolonial struggles in the service of forging a "national" identity" (63). In the formation of national identity, women were repeatedly thought to be the best representatives of tradition, which had harmful effects on their group identities and other interests.

As a continuation of this struggle between nationalism and group interests, women's groups in different postcolonial countries are seen to be in a dilemma about whether the whole idea of feminism is to be seen only as a Western movement. Since historically feminism is, in fact, a western movement, it has been criticized by anti-western viewpoints; alternatives have been put forward in different forums in different postcolonial countries. Largely from this need

to distinguish the struggles of third world women from Western feminism, postcolonial feminism insists on scrutinizing ordinary local women's struggles in global contexts.

Postcolonial feminism attempts to understand colonialism and its residual baggage along with neocolonialism as impediments to a better and equal world for women. This association with colonialism and neocolonialism distinguishes postcolonial feminism from other cultural and theoretical enterprises, believe Rajan and Park as is evident in their essay under discussion. According to them, this involvement also makes this movement politically aware and more empirical than other cultural and theoretical practices.

Up to this part of chapter two, identity formation with reference to postcolonial feminism has been discussed to posit the background of the textual studies of the upcoming chapters. As this dissertation studies female characters in Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri, it seems fit to incorporate postcolonial and postmodern feminism as theoretical frames of the discussion. After giving an account of postcolonial feminism in the above paragraphs, it is time now to focus on postmodern feminism and its role in shaping the identity of the characters to be discussed in other parts of the dissertation.

To sum up, so far in this chapter postcolonial feminism has been briefly introduced to show how it shapes the textual discussion in the coming chapters. The postcolonial past of South Asian women tends to instill in them a sense that they have to represent their culture even while living in diasporic space. The monolithic representation of third world women by white Western feminists is questionable and the plurality of race, class, and ethnicity has to be taken into account while studying the identity formation of women belonging to different parts of the world. Finally, it has been argued that postcolonial issues are now merged with transnational questions to reveal how diasporic women find it more difficult to acculturate in the host country because of the pressure and contradictory demands placed on them from inside and outside, the home and the society. Female characters from selected works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri will thus be analyzed from postcolonial feminist perspective in the next few chapters to show how South Asian women negotiate their identity in the USA and are reborn as new women.

(iv) Postmodern Feminism:

At this stage of Chapter Two, it is important to introduce "postmodern feminism" as it is akin to postcolonial feminism and diaspora studies in some ways. Theorists like Judith Butler, Chela Sandoval, Audre Lorde, Linda J. Nicholson, Linda Hutcheon, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty straddle the boundaries between postcolonial and postmodern feminism and there are a number of similarities between them worth commenting upon in our context.

Though as a part of its rejection of political movements postmodernism is skeptical about feminism, there are some fundamental commonalities between them. Feminism, as a discourse of a repressed section of society, puts forward an alternative to the grand narratives that had been offered by the Enlightenment. Though feminism started as an Enlightenment discourse based on Kantian idea of an autonomous and rational self, it nevertheless questions some Enlightenment ideologies. The construction of sexual difference complicates Enlightenment ideological belief in the principle of sameness and universality. The opposition between the public/private realms segregates feminine and masculine qualities leading to gendered perspectives on everything.

Feminists have also criticized other tenets of Enlightenment and such criticism places them on the same platform as postmodern thinkers. Linda Nicholson maintains, "[f]eminists have criticized other Enlightenment ideals, such as the autonomous and self-legislating self, as reflective of masculinity in the modern West. On such grounds, postmodernism would appear to be a natural ally of feminism" (5). In addition, postmodernism, when applied to feminism, provides the latter with a basis for avoiding the tendency of limiting feminism to the experiences of Western, white, middle-class women. Postmodernism offers feminism useful ideas to transcend such generalizations. It suggests the inclusion of cross-cultural theories informed by knowledge of different culture and regions within the present frame of feminism.

In their essay "Social Criticism without Philosophy" Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson bring out similarities and contrasts between feminism and postmodernism. Both attempt to build social criticism that does not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings. Both have criticized "modern foundationalist epistemologies and moral and political theories, exposing the contingent, partial, and historically situated characters of what has passed in the mainstream for necessary, universal, and ahistorical truths" (26). Both feminism and

postmodernism believe that no knowledge can be universal and ahistorical. From this viewpoint, the significance of an individual subject's history and location are acknowledged as markers of identity. Because of this assumption, postmodernism has identified itself with the feminist politics of the 1980s that generated a movement against the male metanarratives, and acknowledged the importance of contingent history in the making of a person's identity. From 1980 onwards, feminists started to reject the experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual women as representing all women across the globe. For example, writers such as Bell Hooks, Gloria Joseph, Audre Lorde, Maria Lugones, Elizabeth Spelman, Adrienne Rich and Marilyn Frye have critiqued the usual white and heterosexist biases of mainstream feminist theory. Fraser and Nicholson summarize them by suggesting that "quasi-metanarratives" thwart instead of promoting sisterhood (33). These narratives elude plurality among women and ignore the different forms of sexism to which women are subjected to in scattered parts of the world. Fraser and Nicholson also believe that mainstream feminist theory occludes "axes of domination other than gender." In the wake of this situation, feminists are becoming more and more interested in modes of theorizing that "are attentive to differences and historical specificity" (ibid). Therefore, by getting rid of quasi-metanarratives feminism tends to ally itself with progressive movements like postmodernism.

However, there are also some basic differences between feminism and postmodernism. One is that postmodernism's main concern is with the status of philosophy whereas feminism is driven by political praxis. As a result, postmodernism has less practical implications than feminism in the struggle for women's rights.

An alliance between postmodernism and feminism is only possible if postmodernism allows itself to be historical. Feminism has a long tradition of struggle for rights. It has a close relationship with history as gender bias is a historical element whose roots go deep down in contemporary societies. So feminism inevitably takes the form of social criticism when it engages with the vindication of women's rights and their struggle against oppression. Fraser and Nicholson call this trait of feminism its "social-critical power" (34). Such power noted by Fraser and Nicholson, can be accommodated by postmodernism only when the latter is prepared to admit historicity, in particular, a historicity "attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods" (ibid).

Apart from being historical, postmodern-feminist theory tends to be nonuniversalist. A theory that focuses on cross-cultural aspects of women across the globe tends to be comparativist. Unlike second-wave feminism, the focus of which was on white, middle-class women, postmodern-feminist theory considers the differences that prevail among women in different places. Fraser and Nicholson give a succinct idea of postmodern-feminist theory in the following words:

> It would replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. (35)

Although postmodernism dismisses history as a metanarrative, and in spite of its skepticism about politics, it can still make an alliance with feminism. Such an alliance will be mutually beneficial since they have more similarities than differences, as has been shown above. However, in order to come to one position both theories have to make some adjustments. For example, postmodernism has to consider some historical factors whereas feminism has to accommodate plurality and uncertainty. Postmodern-feminist theory can explain the disposition of the new women of South Asian diaspora in the U.S. in a befitting way because plurality and difference construct them.

However, in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism,* postmodern art and literature critic Linda Hutcheon expresses her doubt about an alliance between postmodernism and feminism because of the often opposing nature of these movements. She talks about the resistance that formed against this alliance in the following words

> There has been an understandable suspicion of the deconstructing and undermining impulse of postmodernism at a historic moment when construction and support seem more important agendas for women. (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 19)

What Hutcheon tries to establish here is that the political "ambiguities or paradoxes of postmodernism" are opposed to feminist social agendas that demand "a theory of agency" (22). Postmodernism does not have ideas about positive action on a social level that other feminist positions have. However, she also believes that feminists and postmodern critics have their shared deconstructing impulses. By citing different examples from postmodern narratives, Hutcheon points out the shared ideologies of feminism and postmodernism that can be found in the fictions of Michael Ondaatje, Christa Wolf, and Maxine Hong Kingston. Hutcheon finds out how these writers "not only challenge what we consider to be literature (or rather, Literature) but also what was once assumed to be the seamless, unified narrative representations of subjectivity in life-writing" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 22). Such feminist and postmodern skepticism about seamless, unified representations of subjectivity also extend to other dominant ideologies. Hutcheon voices this feminist and postmodern tendency thus: "[b]oth try to avoid the bad faith of believing they can stand outside ideology, but both want to reclaim their right to contest the power of a dominant one, even if from a compromised position" (ibid).

Hutcheon's account of the relationship between the feminist and the postmodern is another way of looking into what Fraser and Nicholson note about the similarities and differences between these two theories. Hutcheon also comments on the need to consider the differences among women in terms of sexuality, age, race, class, ethnicity, nationality and also diverse political orientations (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 137). She maintains that the major differences between feminism and postmodern lie in their attitude towards politics. Whereas "postmodernism is politically ambivalent for it is doubly coded−both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants within which it operates;" says Hutcheon, "feminisms have distinct, unambiguous political agendas of resistance"(*The Politics of Postmodernism* 138).

However, in spite of their differences, feminism and postmodernism overlap in many ways. They have at times influenced each other. Feminism has inspired postmodernism "to reconsider− in terms of gender− its challenges to that humanist universal called 'Man' and have supported and reinforced its de-naturalization of the separation between the private and the public, the personal and the political;" (163). On the other hand, feminist artists have used postmodern parodic representational strategies for "working within and yet challenging dominant patriarchal discourses" (163). Therefore, the interaction between feminism and postmodernism

has led to mutual changes in the theories. As a feminist influenced by postmodernism, Hutcheon defines postmodern feminism as plural term "feminisms". Though she has in mind Canadian feminism, I believe her definition also fits all branches of postmodern feminisms, be it German or French, or any other form of feminism. Indeed, the definition also fits South Asian feminism well. We have already seen that Chandra Talpade Mohanty is critical of the stereotypical image of third world women constructed by Western feminists and observed that she advocates representation of women informed by differences based on class, race, and ethnicity. When these distinctive identity markers are included in creating women's groups, it implies acknowledging the plurality existing among women across the globe. Therefore, the plural term "feminisms" coined by Hutcheon for North American contexts can be appropriately applied to South Asian feminist practices.

It can be said that postmodern feminism encourages specification as opposed to universalization in order to withstand the self-questioning of women of color, as well as that of women outside the U.S. or Britain. Growing awareness among non-white women, especially in diasporic situations, calls for attention to issues that are new and sometimes unprecedented. Apart from cultural, intellectual, and historical differences, hybridity also plays a vital part in shaping the mindset of diasporic women. In talking about Canadian women, Hutcheon mentions the particularity of their situation by saying that Canadian women are culturally different from women in Britain or the U.S. She also notes that Canadian women have a history of postcoloniality; hence, hybridity is an identity marker for them. A similar historical consciousness is applicable to South Asian women because of the plurality they contain due to their specific social situations, as well as cultural, historical and intellectual contexts. This dissertation analyses some fictional South Asian female characters based on traits in them that originate from their distinctive but postcolonial histories. Therefore, a combined approach of postcolonial and postmodern feminism is useful in tracing the development of the fictional South Asian female characters studied in the upcoming chapters.

The last part of Chapter Three discusses how diasporic female identity is being formed in the current world scenario. Since the concept of diaspora is intricately related to theories of postcolonialism and hybridity, this section adopts an inclusive approach to accommodate all these concepts.

(v) Diasporic Female Identity:

As Stuart Hall has observed, identity formation in diasporic space is not unified, but "multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (Hall 3-4). Because of blurring borders in a postcolonial and diasporic world, concepts of identity can no longer retain their unique traits. Hall points out two diverging features of late modern identities to elucidate their inherent plurality. The first is that identities are subject to "radical historicization"; secondly, they are "constantly in the process of change and transformation" (4). The postcolonial diasporic subject is always grappling with two cultures, languages and ethnicities. Hall explicates this grappling as a continuous process that makes use of "the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being..." (ibid). This process of "becoming" rather than "being" is the true state of the diasporic subject as it is perpetually in the making, but never a complete whole.

It is imperative to note, before moving onto the analysis of diasporic female identity construction that diaspora as a concept is not segregated from other ones such as postcolonialism and postmodernism since all of them share a number of issues. As its perspective is feminist, this dissertation maps out the relationship between gender and diaspora as well as amalgamates them with discourses that share similar issues and concerns. A brief theoretical summation of diasporic identity formation is offered below with references to critics who work with diasporic theories and other related issues. The next parts of this section discuss the intricate pattern of diaspora and other theories as well to trace the shaping of diasporic female identity.

Joel Kuortti captures the evasive nature of diaspora theory by defining it as a combination of disparate cultural materials, traditions, and identities. This diversity, however, does not imply an even relationship among various elements of diaspora. Taking into consideration the intersections between diaspora and post-colonial theories, Kuortti conjectures the possibility of an amalgamated approach, featuring these two in the study of culture and literature. He posits questions of gender, class and race and the problematization of subjectivity and identity as common grounds between diaspora and postcolonial enterprises.

Such questions are associated with the concerns of feminist theorizing, among whom are Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding. They feel that it is important for feminists to "understand and

engage with the continuing effects of colonial history and with the persistence of neocolonial economic and political relationships" (viii). They also believe that issues related to women's emancipation are not limited to certain geographical spaces but intersect national borders (ibid). Thus feminist issues are incorporated into postcolonial and diasporic concerns by feminist thinkers in the context of a rapidly globalizing world.

Joanna de Groot notes that over the last decade a new awareness has grown about the history of colonial and post-colonial power relations with regard to diverse feminist issues even in western feminism. The same concern is found in Avtar Brah when she discusses the idea of 'difference' in the context of diasporic female identity formation. In her essay "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality" Brah gives an account of diasporan identity by taking into consideration the idea of difference. She observes that the term 'difference' in diasporic space incorporates emotional and psychic differences, along with economic, political and cultural divergences. For the diasporic subjects, difference is part of their lived experience and impacts on their subjectivity and identity. Such difference originates from the idea of an inner/outer divide. A diasporic subject faces this divide every time s/he encounters the outside world in diasporic space.

Brah further ties the concept of 'gender' with the existence of 'difference' in the formation of diasporic identity. Gendered identity, as well as diasporic identity, is multiple and 'difference' plays a significant part in its formation. Different feminisms, holds Brah, represent "historically contingent relationships" that carry distinct strands of discourses with them (82). Because of these disparate contexts of discourses, individuals tend to have multiple subject positions in a certain historical period. Branches of feminisms such as black and third world feminism attempt to prove that identity is not a given, but a construct within certain power relations. In this regard, feminisms share some features of diaspora. As the diasporic site requires its people to have multiple identities, separate branches of feminisms also create multiple identities for women by weaving historically contingent power relationships around them.

Following Brah, in her essay "Diasporic Subjects and Migration" Sandra Ponzanesi argues that colonial discourse can be supplemented with a feminist agenda. To her, gender relations have played significant roles in the colonizing process as well as in the nationalist movements of certain colonized nations. She observes that women were positioned to play

contradictory parts by colonized patriarchal as well as colonizing forces. In the first case, women were supposed to perform the role of the upholders of "collective traditional values", whereas in the second they were considered as "emancipated individualized selves", models of liberation set forth by colonizers (Ponzanesi, "Diasporic Subjects and Migration" 210). This trope is particularly important for the dissertation as it works as a major framing argument in the textual analysis part in upcoming chapters.

In the essay "Diasporic Subjects and Migration" mentioned above, Ponzanesi notes that, "from a feminist standpoint, the migrant trope helps to envision the intersection of sex, class, race, age, and lifestyle as fundamental axes of differentiation" ("Diasporic Subjects and Migration" 207). The racial difference that shaped old national identities in the colonies is emphasized in the multicultural split of new sites of power relationships. As for gender differentiation, opines Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), in diasporic space women are made a site of interaction between hegemonic and minority cultures which results in their conflicting identities. These create difficulties for women in the diasporic, post-colonial spaces of multiculturalism where "different cultural traditions− often defined in terms of culturally specific gender relations−are used to reproduce ethnic boundaries" (Ponzanesi, "Diasporic Subjects and Migration" 210). Thus, a diasporic woman faces a dichotomy in the unfolding of her identity, which suffers pull from tradition as well as westernization. This point will be illustrated in the next chapters of the dissertation.

So far in this chapter, three major threads of discussion have been put forward with a view to creating a theoretical framework for the character analyses of some fictional South Asian women residing in the USA. Since the identity formation of these diasporic women is profoundly shaped by their past and present lives, any one theory is unable to ascertain how much they have had to negotiate in diasporic space to recreate their identities. Therefore, postcolonial and postmodern feminism, along with diasporic identity formation, are studied in this chapter as foundations upon which the textual analyses will be carried out in the next few chapters.

From the preceding discussion, we can conclude that diasporan female identity formation has had a complex relationship with a matrix of intersections, involving two or more cultures, languages, and ethnicities. This involvement creates problematic connections between ideas of diaspora and other discourses such as postcolonialism and postmodernism, since all three of

them share analogous tropes. Sandra Ponzanesi observes that these are two ways of exploring the idea of diaspora, the first of which bridges it with postcolonialism. She observes that when diaspora is considered as a concept for disclosing the living condition of minorities and migrants, it creates a connection between the histories of colonization with the modern global phenomena of migration. She opines that such a connection leads to an interaction between postcolonialism and modern global politics that is facilitated by multinational capitalism. To be precise, Ponzanesi refers here to diasporic causes of indentured labour migration that made people migrate to former colonial centers as railway or plantation workers. She further compares diaspora with postcoloniality as "both express aspects of placement and displacement" (*Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* 11). Interestingly, when seen in the context of recent discourses, diaspora also seems to contain traits similar to postmodernism. The "deterritorialized social identities" of diaspora resembles the postmodern uncertainty associated with fixed identity (Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* 11). In addition, diasporic transnational flows of people and money blur borders to create the postmodern sense of fluidity and plurality. Therefore, diasporic identity becomes a complex amalgamation of aspects frequently attributed to postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Avtar Brah, herself a diasporic figure was born in Uganda, but is of Indian origin and resides in the UK. She defines diaspora as both physical and intellectual dislocation. She upholds the view that in a sense diaspora is a postmodern idea as in diasporic space "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" because of the persistent conflict between tradition and adaptation that haunts migrants perpetually (Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* 208). Taking her cue from this argument, Brah goes on to analyze diasporic consciousness as a state that enables migrants to reconsider postcolonial perception of borders. Since diaspora is associated with the blurring of borders, it requires grappling with two cultures or languages, which is in a way similar to the postcolonial experience. A diasporic subject can think of postcolonialism as a state of merging the lines of national communes.

Postcolonial discourse encompasses issues such as "new forms of selfhood, political allegiance, capital accumulation, imperial power, and mass migration, forms whose contours are still half-visible"(Mufti and Shohat 2). Mufti and Shohat's inclusive comment in the introduction

to *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* gestures at the intersections among postcolonial study and other discourses of the contemporary world. They define postcolonial discourse as a "familiar mode of cultural practice in the Anglo-American academy" (2). They comment that a new perspective on imperialism has developed in different parts of the world after the anticolonial revolutionary movements for national liberation took place in colonized countries. This new perspective attempts to grapple with, as Mufti and Shohat put it, "the meaning of location and belonging, of communities of interpretation and praxis, of home in the increasingly diasporic panoramas of the contemporary world" (ibid). In Mufti and Shohat we once again see the blending of postcolonialism and diaspora.

Before concluding the theoretical discussion of Chapter Two, I should mention that in coming chapters the textual analyses carried out in them will continually refer back to this chapter as their theoretical foundation.

Since this dissertation studies diasporic female identity along with post-colonial and postmodern feminism, it is crucial also to synthesize all these theories to create a meaningful framework for analysis. I discussed the intermingling of diaspora, post-colonialism, and postmodernism in the previous paragraphs to argue that these three projects center on common phenomena such as race, class and gender, among many other related ideas. In the first four sections of Chapter Two, I discussed female identity formation in the light of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Then I related the shaping of diasporic female identity with issues present in both postcolonialism and postmodernism. However, it is not my purpose to assimilate them, since notwithstanding the convergences, the motivation and interest of these projects are very asymmetrical. This point was also made in the second part of the current chapter. The dissertation will thus adapt a textual analysis of diasporic female identity formation through a post-colonial and postmodern feminist perspective. To that end, I have arrived at the intersectionality of diaspora, postcolonialism, and postmodernism to emphasize their combined influence on the identity formation of fictional women characters from Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri. The next chapter, the third one of the dissertation, will build its argument around two novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. The reading of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is another significant feature of Chapter Three. Chapter Four and Five independently study two short story collections by Divakaruni and Lahiri, whereas the next chapter reads three novels by three different writers in a

comparative manner. However, the main theoretical framework of the dissertation– postcolonial and postmodern feminism, along with diasporic female identity construction, will remain the same for Chapter Three.

Chapter Three

A Study of Transforming Female Characters in South Asian Women Writers

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The previous chapter discusses postcolonial and postmodern feminism and diaspora theory in order to comprehend how South Asian woman characters' identity is formed in diasporic space. Chapter Three is focused on three women characters from three novels studied through postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminist lenses. Jasmine from Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), Rakhi from *Queen of Dreams* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, (2004) and Gouri from Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) are studied in the present chapter. However, I do not offer a comparative study of the characters; instead, I study them individually in the contexts of the respective novels in which they appear.

Chapter Three reads the above-mentioned three novels to follow the identity formation of their pivotal female characters. Within a theoretical framework constructed from postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism the identity formation of the key female characters is considered as part of the same current that projects different stages of their diasporic journeys. Due to temporal, spatial, and socio-political reasons, the three characters grow differently in the pages of these three novels, although they share the same ethnic identity. With the passage of time, diasporic theory has become complicated because of its intermingling with other contemporary theories such as transnationalism, neo-cosmopolitanism, and queer theory. The present chapter attempts to use insights derived from these theories according to the changed circumstances the three characters face at different points of their life. Following the chronology based on the year of publications, Chapter Three first discusses Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, then Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and finally Lahiri's *The Lowland.*

(i) *Jasmine*:

In *The Middleman and Other Stories*, Bharati Mukherjee portrays a character called Jasmine in a story of the same name. At first, she did not have any intention to expand the story into a full novel but the Jasmine in the story was a character with whom she "fell in love with" and "would have liked to have been" (Mukherjee18). Although the Jasmine in the novel is different from the one in the short story, both are similar in the sense that they are fighters and adaptable. Both the Trinidadian Jasmine in the short story and the Punjabi Jasmine in the novel see their endeavors in America as opportunities for climbing higher in the social stratum.

Arguably the most popular novel by Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* has evoked much criticism worldwide since its publication in 1989. It has not only been placed in the syllabi of different universities of the world, including American ones, but has also been researched as a text for postgraduate study. The exploration of this text here takes a cue from, though it does not extend, the doctoral thesis of Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero titled "Translating Postcolonial Pasts: Immigration and Identity in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, Elizabeth Nunez, and Jhumpa Lahiri." In her dissertation, Alfonso-Forero argues against the frequent labeling of *Jasmine* as a novel that portrays an "ever-victimized "third world" woman rescued by liberal Western values" (42). Alfonso-Forero recuperates the novel by showing its inherent criticism of America's wasteful consumerism, its racism, its cultural ignorance, and inhumane treatment of illegal immigrants. She builds up the first part of her proposition around an article by Inderpal Grewal named "Reading and Writing the South Asian Diaspora: Feminism and Nationalism in North America". Grewal, along with other two critics Susan Koshy and Anu Aneja, had criticized Bharati Mukherjee harshly for her derogatory treatment of Asia and Asian women and her idealization of America in *Jasmine*. However, Alfonso-Forero takes her stand against these critics by showing that although "Mukherjee perhaps does not dismantle the term [America] by stripping American identity of its power and privilege, [but] she does challenge its exclusivity and abuses" (42).

In this dissertation, the use of Alfonso-Forero is pertinent in the sense that the argument in the next sections of the present chapter focuses on Jasmine's struggle in the United States as an illegal immigrant with a postcolonial past. Alfonso-Forero acknowledges the significance of Jasmine's past by saying that: "… a careful analysis of the text through the lens of the impressive body of Mukherjee's non-fiction prose on issues of gendered, cultural, national, and artistic identities reveals its complicated representation of the postcolonial immigrant experience" (35). I also see *Jasmine* through some of Mukherjee's non-fiction prose that clarifies her beliefs and convictions as an American immigrant with a postcolonial past. Like Mukherjee herself, Jasmine is also largely shaped by her colonial past and her present status as an illegal immigrant.

Apart from Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero, a large number of critics have studied *Jasmine* from their distinctive perspectives. Inderpal Grewal, for instance, reads the novel as a valorization of the dominant power structure of the United States. In a similar reading of the novel, Susan Koshy and Anu Aneja analyze the overpowering affirmation of women's liberation

at the cost of race and cultural diversity in *Jasmine*. Both Ralph J. Crane and Gurleen Grewal view *Jasmine* as a bildungsroman. Crane considers approaching "*Jasmine* as a female bildungsroman, as a novel which specifically traces the development of a female protagonist from childhood through various experiences and crises, into maturity and, more importantly, her self-identity and place in the world"(n. pag.). However, Grewal indicts Mukherjee for creating an implausible plot in *Jasmine* where she pays zero attention to the ethnic identity of the protagonist. Not that every critic views the novel in the same way. For example, focusing on the unique features of *Jasmine,* Fakrul Alam comments, "[n]evertheless, Mukherjee has gone out of her way to distance herself from American feminists in her portrayal of Jasmine" by making her someone who embodies a dichotomy within herself. She is not only desperate to do the right thing for herself but also "tries very hard to please others and be as feminine as possible" (115). The violent path that led to Jasmine's metamorphosis is the subject matter of Kristine Carter Sanborn's essay ""We Murder Who We Were" *Jasmine* and the Violence of Identity". Samir Dayal also brings up the issue of violence in the narrative of *Jasmine* in "Creating, Preserving, Destroying: Violence in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*".

For the purpose of this dissertation, the argument in this chapter resorts to postcolonial, postmodern and diasporic feminist theories, but merges them with ideas gathered from Mukherjee's non-fictional prose. Going against critics like Inderpal and Gurleen Grewal, Susan Koshy and Anu Aneja, this chapter intends to show that Jasmine forges an identity in the novel that translates her postcolonial past in pluralistic fashion so as to create a postmodern identity in the diasporic space of the United States.

Bharati Mukherjee herself is a postcolonial writer who has been dislocated and relocated several times in her life. Born in Calcutta, educated in England, Switzerland, and India, she spent her mature life as both an academic and a writer in Canada and the United States. Even her early days in India are marked by a sense of dichotomy and instability. She gives a lucid account of this contradiction in her essay "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" where she says:

> I was born into a class that did not live in its native language. I was born into a city that feared its future and trained me for emigration. … All my girlhood, I straddled the seesaw of contradictions. *Bilayat*, meaning the scary, unknown "abroad," was both boom time and desperate loss. (24)

Mukherjee believes that the dichotomies she saw as a way of life from her childhood shaped her mature literary life in indelible ways. In the aforementioned essay, she admits that despite placing a lot of hope and energy in the process of immigration and accommodation, she could not ride a public bus after first arriving in the United States. Mukherjee also notes that she retains parts of her older selves underneath the masks she has put on of a newer self. As a storyteller, she has been much influenced by her mother and grandmother who acquainted her with the world of Hindu epics. The multiple selves that her characters contain have their roots in Indian mythology where shape-changing, miracles, and godly perspectives are considered as regular phenomena.

(a) Mirroring of Postcolonial Feminism in *Jasmine*

The protagonist of *Jasmine* is a young Indian girl from the backward Punjabi village of Hasnapur. However, Jasmine (originally named as Jyoti) is a very unconventional girl, given her background and upbringing. Her rebellious and fearless nature is obvious from a very young age; she is inclined to breaking rules and forging ahead, overcoming whatsoever obstructs her way. At the age of seven, she challenges the fortuneteller of her village, an act of fearless defiance and rebellion, characteristics she carries with her all through the novel. However, in her way of caring for people and her attempt to make everyone happy she reminds readers of the traditional Indian woman. Here Fakrul Alam's comment is appropriate: "[n]evertheless, Mukherjee has gone out of her way to distance herself from American feminists in her portrayal of Jasmine" by making her someone who embodies a dichotomy within herself. She is not only desperate to do the right thing for herself but also "tries very hard to please others and be as feminine as possible" (115).

In her doctoral dissertation on *Jasmine* Alfonso-Forero points out the importance of considering Mukherjee's past as glimpsed in her nonfictional prose in any interpretation of her novel by noting that "Mukherjee's nonfiction reveals many of the attitudes towards Indian and North American cultures that shape Jasmine's development as a postcolonial, immigrant heroine" (Alfonso-Forero 43).Thus Alfonso-Forero seeks to bridge Jasmine's postcolonial past and immigrant identity. This chapter is also keen on finding out the postcolonial aspects of Jasmine's character that prompt her to act in the particular way depicted in the novel in her Americanization.

In *Bharati Mukherjee,* Alam notes that Jasmine's childhood and adolescence were spent "in a semi-feudal, rural, and patriarchal society" of a village called Hasnapur in Punjab, a state in the northwestern corner of India (100). After the death of her husband Prakash Vijh, Jasmine decides to travel to the Florida International Institute of Technology, a place where Prakash was admitted before his brutal murder, to commit *sati*, in other words, to burn herself alive so as to be with her departed husband. The very decision of committing *Sati* exposes Jasmine's adherence to the age-old tradition of Indian Hindu widows. In fact, it is mentioned in the novel that Vimla, a widow of twenty-two of the village had burnt herself on a stove and that incident had left a profound mark on Jasmine. This girl has been valorized as a martyr in Hasnapur where people imbued this act with symbolic import. "… [S]he had broken her pitcher; she saw there were no insides and outsides. We are just shells of the same Absolute. In Hasnapur, Vimla's isn't a sad story" (Mukherjee 15). As Jasmine ruminates on the suicide, her voice is ambiguous. It is possible that despite all her rebelliousness, she shares the view of the other villagers.

Jasmine's identity flourishes in America but is intricately linked to a past in India that is jagged with haunting and traumatic memories of the Partition, a very significant event of Indian history. From her birth to her marriage, what Jasmine experiences in Hasnapur is part of the consequence of Partition. Her father could never overcome the painful experience of leaving behind a prosperous house in Pakistan. Naturally, he was never able to cope with a changed situation in India where, in order to forget the present, he took refuge in nostalgia and withdrew from his surroundings. Jasmine's mother, though less withdrawn from life than her husband (no doubt because she had to take care of the family), was nevertheless equally aggrieved because of Partition.

> God is cruel to partition the country, she said, to uproot our family from a city like Lahore where we had lived for centuries, and fling us to a village of flaky mud huts. In Lahore my parents had lived in a big stucco house with porticoes and gardens. They had owned farmlands, shops. An alley had been named after a great-uncle. (Mukherjee 41)

Such change from prosperity to degradation is impossible to assuage and Jasmine's parents would forever relive their past glories in family lore in which "Lahore was magic and Lahore was chaos" (ibid). According to Jasmine, her father all but lived in a bunker as he took refuge in the past, denying the present. However, Jasmine is different because she believes that the "[f]act

is, there was a difference. My father was right to notice it and to let it set a standard. But that pitcher is broken. It is the same air this side as that. He'll never see Lahore again and I never have. Only a fool would let it rule his life" (Mukherjee 43). Jasmine's realization of the futility of her father's disposition makes her eager to embrace changes of identity in America.

What critics such as Inderpal Grewal and Susan Koshy have termed as stereotypical representation of third world women by Mukherjee in *Jasmine*, can thus be alternately viewed as a document of the disillusioned life of people in a newly decolonized country tattered by political strife. Mukherjee, in depicting Jasmine and the society she lives in Hasnapur, is essentially depicting the devastating consequence of colonization and its aftermaths like Partition. The atrocities of the Khalsa Lions are political consequence of Partition that had a life-changing effect on Jasmine.

In her multiple identities gathered in America, Jasmine often reminisces about her traumatic past and hints at how it has shaped her present. Alfonso-Forero skillfully coalesces Mukherjee's feelings about her own past with Jasmine's psychological condition in the following words:

> Jasmine, who is born into a socioeconomic position rendered quite uncomfortable by Independence (and particularly by the consequences of Partition), is raised in the shadow of this undivided and colonial India. Although this is not to say or imply in any way that Mukherjee advocates colonial rule, she clearly takes issue with the socioeconomic effects of Independence and Partition and means to illustrate the often-violent growing pains experienced by the new nation. (Alfonso-Forero 52,53)

As a child, Mukherjee witnessed the bloody partition riots between Muslims and Hindus and the language riots between Bengalis and Biharis. In her non-fictional prose work "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties" she writes:

> As a child, I had witnessed bloody religious riots between Muslims and Hindus, and violent language riots between Bengalis and Biharis. People kill for culture, and die of hunger. Language, race, religion, blood, myrth, history, national codes, and manners, have all been used, in India, in the United States, …. (30)

Having experienced such trauma Mukherjee, like her protagonist Jasmine, turned against the fixity of cultures. One habit, inherited from a bitter experience that Jasmine mentions in narrating the Iowa part of the novel, she carried from her past. Since there were water famines in Hasnapur and "docile women turned savage for the last muddy bucketful [,]" Jasmine became a hoarder of water in Elsa County (Mukherjee 16). As she tells us, "[e]ven here, I store water in orange-juice jars, plastic milk bottles, tumblers, mixing bowls, any container I can find" (ibid).This is one of many examples that can be given to show how Jasmine's past shapes her present identity.

The nonlinear narration of *Jasmine* moves between the present and past but the narrative does not fail to indicate how Jasmine recalls her Hasnapuri past in her everyday life in America. After splitting her tongue, murdering half-face, and lighting a pyre out of her suitcase, Jasmine starts her first full American day with a commitment to live, instead of committing *Sati*. She continues to walk through a path that seems no different from that she would take in India. This familiarity gives her hope for a new life. She thinks: "I had traveled the world without ever leaving the familiar crops of Punjab. Thinking I was among farmers, that I might find food, water, and work, I decided to follow the trail" (Mukherjee 128).

On the same trail, she meets Lillian Gordon, her savior in America, a person who represents all the goodness of the country. Later, Gordon refers to Jasmine's postcolonial past as a blessing in that British colonization gave her the English language that would give her an edge over immigrants from other countries. When Gordon was teaching Jasmine to "walk American" she commented that Jasmine was lucky to be from a country that was once a British colony (Mukherjee 133). She also tells Jasmine that if she walks and talks American no one would doubt her status as a citizen. Jasmine's language and capability of adaptation prompt Gordon to think that she is not "a picker or a domestic" and is meant for a better profession (Mukherjee 134).

Although Jasmine relives her past in many ways, perhaps the most important marker of her past identity is food. It plays a significant role from the very beginning. Jasmine is found in her kitchen at Iowa in the second chapter of the book. Darrel, whose farm can be seen from Jasmine's kitchen, planted coriander, dill weed, fenugreek, and five kinds of chili peppers for her to use in her Indian dishes. Jasmine often cooks Indian food for Darrel and the other Americans at Iowa. About this habit, she observes: "People are getting used to some of my concoctions, even if they make a show of fanning their mouths. They get disappointed if there's not *something*

Indian on the table" (Mukherjee 9). Jasmine also hybridizes food by taking gobi aloo to the Lutheran Relief Fund craft fair and by serving matar panir with pork. This hybridization is an assertion of Jasmine's past, but in the context of the novel, it also works as a tool for subverting American culture. Food is not only a means of changing culinary taste here, opines Alfonso-Forero, but it does more than that. Jasmine, clearly, is making use of her power through food to make an impression on mainstream American culture. An example of her success in doing so is Darrel's failed attempt at cooking Indian food with heaps of spices to please Jasmine. Food is, for Jasmine, "a way of granting or withholding love" (Mukherjee 216).

Jasmine's new identities in America are in many ways tainted by her past. However, her constant journey through different identities also shows the postmodern facet of her personality. The next section of the chapter discusses the postmodern feministic aspects in Jasmine's identity formation.

(b) *Jasmine* and Postmodern Feminism:

"There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so can we rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams" (Mukherjee 29). Jasmine's oft-quoted words remind us that this novel is essentially about remaking and rebirthing. With each name Jasmine acquires in the novel, she experiences a life in keeping with that specific name. Her identity changes with every single name she is given. The interesting factor is this: though Jasmine admits that navigation through different identities is painful, she seems quite at ease with each of them. The second section of Chapter Three scrutinizes how Jasmine's multiple identities can be seen in perspective with the help of postmodern feminism.

In the essay "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties" Mukherjee gives an account of her disposition towards her own identity. The fixity of identity was a given fact for Bharati Mukherjee from her childhood because when she was growing up in Calcutta in the 1950s, "[she] heard no talk of "identity crisis"–communal or individual. The concept itself-of a person not knowing who she or he was–was unimaginable in a hierarchical, classification-obsessed society. One's identity was absolutely fixed, derived from religion, caste, patrimony, and mother-tongue" (30). This disposition in Mukherjee about an identity that is a given is thoroughly shaken because of the political and cultural circumstances that she experiences. As a child, she witnessed religious and cultural riots that created a permanent resentment in her about the purity of identity. As a result, it was easier for her to opt for new identities repeatedly in her

diasporic life. She recalls in the essay "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties" how she came to the United States with a large notebook given to her by her father. In that notebook, her "guiltlessly patriarchal father" set some clear goals for her (29). But, Mukherjee notes the futility of such instructions by admitting:

> That impulsive act (her marriage with Clark Blaise) cut me forever from the rules and ways of upper-middle-class life in Bengal, and hurled me precipitously into a New World life of scary improvisations and heady exploitations. Until my lunchtime wedding, I had seen my life as an Indian foreign student, a transient in the United States. The five-minute ceremony in the lawyer's office had changed me into a permanent transient. (30)

Mukherjee refers thus to her position as someone who had been permanently transient in the sense that there would be no fixity in her identity; rather, she assumed whatever self was needed to cope with changed situations. Her portrayal of Jasmine vividly reflects these moments of her own life. Jasmine makes the utmost use of these "scary improvisations" and "heady exploitations" in shaping her multiple identities. In her eventful American life, Jasmine has to make and remake herself repeatedly to fit in and to go on. The curious thing is that she does not see herself as a victim. Mukherjee makes her character enjoy the transformations and at the same time feel empowered, rather than overpowered by each of her identities. It is also worth noting that though Jasmine is given each of her names by different men, only Prakash partially shapes her identity. All the other identities are made and lived by Jasmine's own will.

In his monograph on Bharati Mukherjee, Alam places *Jasmine* in the "Exuberance of Immigration" phase of the writer's life. While writing *Jasmine*, Mukherjee was feeling excited "about the ceremony in a Federal District Court House in Manhattan that February that made her a citizen of the United States" (Alam 77). Likewise, her characters of the two books Mukherjee wrote in this period, *The Middleman and Other Stories* and *Jasmine*, narrate the stories of the new immigrants whose life is full of "exuberant tales of immigration", the writer fills them "with surprising stories of the clash of cultures, and with fascinating portraits of people in transit or caught in the middle or split between an old world and a new one" (Alam 78). According to Alam, the "exuberance of immigration" phase of Mukherjee's life is preceded by the "darkness phase" of her writing, which was about expatriates "trying to preserve their identities in a hostile

world" (ibid). On the other hand, in the exuberant phase of Mukherjee's life, she dealt with "immigrants striving to transform their identities and stake out their claims to America" (ibid).

Jasmine is one of these immigrants who strive to transform their identities. She is very flexible in the sense that she constantly changes her profession, dwelling, role, and name in the narrative. As I have stated earlier, she is the controller of her own actions and identities. To analyze Jasmine's identity formation from a postmodern feminist perspective, it helps to observe her growth from the viewpoint of postmodern feminism. In this section, the chapter makes use of Judith Butler's performative theory along with the theory of Chandra Talpade Mohanty about the individuality of third world women and takes note of third world feminist issues to study Jasmine's evolution through her different identities in the novel.

In "Interrogating the Ambivalence of Self-Fashioning and Redefining the Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" Suchismita Banerjee interrogates Bharati Mukherjee's views of female agency. Banerjee argues that Mukherjee makes Jasmine use her foreignness as something exotic in order to become more attractive in the eyes of white men. By luring white men towards her, she exercises her power over them. Mukherjee distinguishes between the exotic and foreign by saying that "[e]xotic means you know how to use your foreignness, or you make yourself a little foreign in order to appear exotic" (qtd. in Banerjee 22). Banerjee observes that Mukherjee thus makes a statement about feminist agency by presenting Jasmine as "empowered with the choice of identity creation because she knows how to use her exotic appeal" (Banerjee 22).Mukherjee emphasizes Jasmine's third world origin as opposed to Western feminism by commenting that Jasmine is an activist and a woman of action. Jasmine's feminism does not conform to Western feminism because she exercises her agency by manipulating her foreignness. In an interview Mukherjee describes Jasmine as a feminist activist in the sense that "more than Wylie, or any other American woman, [she] manages to leave a futile world, make herself over, pick up men, discard men, and make money. She's an uneducated village girl…. [who] can make a life for herself. So she's an activist – or a woman of action – who ends up being far more feminist than the women on Claremont Avenue who talk about feminism" (qtd. in Banerjee 23).

However, echoing Susan Koshy, Banerjee finds Mukherjee's description of agency and power problematic and opines that the refashioning of Jasmine's identity by herself is an ambiguous action because, on the one hand, such agency requires pleasing men, which is a

gesture downright opposite to Western notions of feminist agency. On the other hand, Jasmine's autonomy is measured by Western criteria like controlling men, making money and having a career. But when accused of making her heroines swerve from their ideals and making them "ultimately cast their lot with men [,]" Mukherjee speaks out against "the imperialism" of feminists and accuses them of being ready to impose "ready-made" solutions to the problems facing immigrant Asian women in North America (qtd. in Alam 12). Mukherjee claims that she would "enable [immigrants] to control their fates than make them mouthpieces of white, upper-class feminist rhetoric" (Alam 12).

Mukherjee's emphatic claim in such an instance reminds one of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's account of Western, middle class, white feminism. Traditional Western feminism, especially second-wave feminism, refers to third world women as a homogenous, singular group. Mohanty criticizes the representation of third world women as a "singular, monolithic" subject in Western feminist texts because such representation assumes "an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination" ("Under Western Eyes…" 51, 64). The homogenizing of women across the globe is founded on the notion of a shared oppression. Such homogeneity creates a problem for the collective term "women." In her essay, Mohanty observes that while the term "women" may denote a discursively constructed group, another denotation of the term, the fact that women are "material subjects of their own history", thereby remains neglected (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes…" 56). Thus the discursively formulated definition undermines the "historically specific material reality of groups of women" (ibid).

Both Mohanty and Mukherjee seem to claim that third world women are culturally and historically different from their white, Western counterparts. Therefore, whenever the power and agency of a colored, third world woman like Jasmine is considered, it has to be viewed in terms of her own cultural and historical contingencies. Postmodern feminism believes in theorizing this kind of plurality among women across the globe. Hence, the emancipation of Jasmine, viewed from a postmodern lens, is not to be deigned but can be understood.

Jasmine refashions herself repeatedly in the narrative whenever she changes her location. This chapter would like to read such shifts with the help of Judith Butler's ideas as illustrated in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." In *Jasmine*, the protagonist often declares that she is performing multiple

roles consciously to change the design of fate. In her essay, Butler assumes that identity is performative as gender is a socially constructed idea. At the beginning of her discourse, Butler aligns the act of performativity with philosophy rather than theatre before tethering her argument to Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman" (qtd. in Butler 519). Butler claims that "naturalized conceptions of gender" is constituted and is "hence, capable of being constituted differently" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution…" 520). I argue that Jasmine makes use of these naturalized conceptions of gender to remold herself in the light of her dreams.

Butler, being an American feminist, opposes the perpetuation of socially constructed gender identity. However, Jasmine consciously resorts to performativity of gender, by making herself an amalgamation of Mukherjee's representative of transforming individual and Mohanty's example of third world feminism's plurality. Mukherjee herself defines Jasmine as "an uneducated village girl… [who] can make a life for herself. So she's an activist – or a woman of action – who ends up being far more feminist than the women on Claremont Avenue who talk about feminism" (Mukherjee 25-26). In other words, to her, her heroine's nonconformity to Butler's criticism of performative gender is logically plausible. Since Jasmine is an Indian uneducated village girl, her views of empowerment have every chance of clashing with Western notions of feminism.

Jasmine's emancipation thus does not comply with Western views of feminist empowerment. Her agency is tangled and problematic. In her Master's thesis "The Maximalist Transformation of the Female Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*" Lauren D. Hazenson analyzes Jasmine's multiple identities in the following words:

> The text's tangled structure allows Jasmine the freedom to float between classic Western feminist female characters such as Jane Eyre, Eliza Doolittle and Calamity Jane to powerful Indian goddess Kali. This structure also prescribes the breakdown of cultural barriers in such a way that it nullifies the boundaries between American and Indian classic literature. (15)

Hazenson thus indicates that Jasmine's emancipation cannot be measured by any standardized formula. Her agency follows the pattern of postmodern feminism's idea of plurality that accommodates individual instances as normative.

Before returning to Butler, I will attempt to ascertain the extent of Jasmine's consciousness about performativity. It seems to me that in most cases she deliberately chooses her role and acts it out willingly. Her role-playing can be divided into two phases of her life–pre and post American. The first change of her identity, from Jyoti to Jasmine, is caused by her husband Prakash who, being a modern man, wants to "break down the Jyoti [she] had been in Hasnapur and make [her] a new kind of city woman" (Mukherjee 77). She incarnates Kali in herself when she kills half-face but turns into Jazzy at Lillian Gordon's house while learning to "talk and walk" American from her (Mukherjee 133). In the Vadhera Household in Flushing, Jasmine feels that she is losing herself in their ghettoized life. Therefore, she decides to create a new identity for herself yet again by becoming a caregiver in the Hayes' apartment. This identity is deliberately chosen by herself. As she notes: "I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful" (Mukherjee 171).

In Iowa Bud calls her "Calamity Jane" but Jasmine declares that she wants to be Plain Jane because "[p]lain Jane is a role, like any other" (Mukherjee 26). The maimed Bud, observes Jasmine: "…likes me to change roles, from caregiver to temptress, and I try to do it convincingly, walking differently, frowning, smiling…" (Mukherjee 36). However, when it comes to the choice between "the promise of America and old-world dutifulness", she chooses to leave Bud and move Westward with Taylor. "I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove" (Mukherjee 240). These words of Jasmine not only leave the novel open-ended, but also leave Jasmine open to other identities. She mostly controls the multiple identities she accommodates throughout the narrative, including the last adventurous one she visualizes with Taylor towards the end of the text.

In her essay, Butler criticizes the fact that the performance of gender is normalized in society at the cost of "an historically delimited possibility…" (522). Jasmine constantly changes her identity as a strategy of survival. As Butler puts it: "as a strategy of survival, gender is a

performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (ibid). Thus, by seemingly conforming to the normalizing process of the society, Jasmine is asserting her agency. In her essay ""Subverting the taste buds" of America: Transnational Political Agency in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989)" Sumita Lall defines Jasmine's identity shifts as "a fragmented subjectivity as a model for the immigrant's postmodern survival under Global Capitalism" (49). Lall argues that "Jasmine embodies what could be called an ideal subjectivity in a postmodern world: fragmented, split, and ever-shifting or nomadic in her global cultural positioning" (ibid). Such subjectivity in Jasmine upholds the theory of the performativity of gender and makes her postmodern.

(c) Woman in the Diaspora: Always in the Flux:

Mukherjee draws clear lines between different types of transformations among immigrants based on their dispositions and character traits. Jasmine's realization of the dissimilarity in the nature and extent of adaptation in the analysis of her adopted Vietnamese son Du and herself is illustrated in the following words:

> I am amazed, and a little proud that Du had made a life for himself among the Vietnamese in Baden and I hadn't had a clue. Aside from Dr. Jaswani and from Dr. Patel in Infertility, I haven't spoken to an Indian since my months in Flushing. My transformation has been genetic; Du's was hyphenated. (Mukherjee 222)

Jasmine's concluding line clearly demarcates two ways to become an American as a diasporic subject. Jasmine makes her status clear by declaring that her "transformation [as an American] has been genetic" (Mukherjee 222). Her disposition, in fact, voices Mukherjee's own view about immigration in many aspects. For example, in her essay "Two Ways to Belong in America", she points out the difference between her sister and herself by noting that her adaptation to American culture was spontaneous, like an immigrant, as opposed to her expatriate sister's adaptation to the same culture. Jasmine's diasporic journey does not end in stasis; rather it opens up new possibilities of exploring new horizons. It is clear that as a diasporic woman Jasmine is very fluid and adventurous, someone to whom onward movement is more thrilling than reaching a destination.

This section of Chapter Three studies how Jasmine relates to Mukherjee's own experience of immigration that she recounts in many of her non-fiction writings. To that end, it explores her personal experiences as recorded in many of her non-fiction writings as well as in writings about her life.

About Mukherjee's immigrant life, Alam comments in his book *Bharati Mukherjee*, "her personal history consists of a series of displacements and expatriations" (8). Alam describes the phases of Mukherjee's experience as an immigrant in it. As he points out:

> Mukherjee's attitude towards exile, expatriation, and immigration has changed over the years. Although she now has a full and joyous sense of herself as "an immigrant, living in a continent of immigrants", she had at first felt like an exile, or at best an expatriate. (9)

The three phases that Mukherjee negotiated can thus be termed as that of "exile", "expatriate", and "immigrant". Later in his book Alam divides Mukherjee's literary career into three phases as well, characterizing them thus−the "aloofness of expatriation", the "exuberance of immigration", and a "hunger for connectedness".

Alam places *Jasmine* in "the exuberance of immigration" phase of Mukherjee's literary career. This phase coincides with the publication of Mukherjee's essay "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!" This essay registers Mukherjee's movement "away from the "darkness" phase of her writing, where she dealt with expatriates trying to transform their identities in a hostile world, to immigrants striving to transform their identities and stake out their claims to America" (Alam 78).

In her "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!" Bharati Mukherjee articulates many of the ideas that she would later invest in creating Jasmine, the protagonist of the novel by the same name. Mukherjee observes that characters like Jasmine have lived through "centuries of histories in a single lifetime". Mukherjee comments that these rural, colonized, and tradition-bound people have travelled time in transformative ways. She thinks that the assimilation of these people in 30 years has taken the West "10 times that number of years to create. Time travel is a reality−I've seen it in my own life. Bionic Men and Women are living among us" (n.pag.). Jasmine, in her several symbolic rebirths, reminds the readers of the bionic people Mukherjee describes with fervor.

In *Jasmine*, the protagonist talks repeatedly about her immigrant experience in terms of rebirth, echoing the "time travel" theory of Mukherjee, based on gathering experiences and carving a trajectory in the light of those experiences. Such travel does not require infinite time for life-changing experiences. In the very first chapter, Jasmine recalls an incident about her village astrologer in Hasnapur, placed in Punjab, by saying that it happened "[l]ifetimes ago," indicating thus that the present Jasmine was reborn and living a new life (Mukherjee 3). Commenting on the way she has adapted to American life, Jasmine says all surviving immigrants like her are "quick studies" who "let go just one thing, like not wearing a tika on the forehead−the rest goes on its own down a sinkhole" (Mukherjee 29). Jasmine does not suffer from nostalgia because she knows "[f]or me, experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill" (Mukherjee 33). However, she does not forget the reincarnations that have made her a surviving warrior. To Mary Webb, a university professor who asks Jasmine about the rebirths of Hindus, she replies "I am sure that I have been reborn several times, and that yes, some lives I can recall vividly" (Mukherjee 126). Therefore, Jasmine considers her diasporic life as a combination of several lifetimes, a journey that started in her childhood and was still going on.

Jasmine believes that her assimilation to America was genetic, and not hyphenated. This can be directly related to Mukherjee's own realization in the essay "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" where she announced:

> I am an American, I am an American writer, in the American mainstream, trying to extend it. This is a vitally important statement for me−I am not an Indian writer, not an exile, not an expatriate….I look on ghettoization−whether as a Bengali in India or as a hyphenated Indo-American in North America−as a temptation to be surmounted. (2)

This quote testifies to the fact that becoming American was Mukherjee's conscious choice. She embraced America to blend with it as an American, casting aside other hyphenated identities. Jasmine's rejection of hyphenation thus reflects Mukherjee's own stance on diasporic subjectivity.

In another essay "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties" Mukherjee expresses her anguish against Eurocentrists and ethnocentrists who create a hostile binary among European and Asian immigrants with an "us" versus "them" mentality. Mukherjee launches a new discourse to "reconstitute the hostile biology" by creating "a new *consensual* community of

we" (32). Jasmine's yearning to avoid ghettoization and blend with mainstream American community is mostly evidenced in the Vadhera house where Indian identity is artificially maintained. Here she wants to distance herself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like. This yearning reaches its peak when she visits Kate Gordon-Feldstein's apartment, which she finds disordered in a way that speaks to her of flexibility, freedom, and possibility. She finds all these things in her new life as a caregiver in the Hayes household on Claremont Avenue. Jasmine's Americanization is nurtured in the free environment of the Hayeses' house where she is treated as a professional, and a family member, rather than as a servant. Jasmine describes her growth there in the following words:

> I took in everything. Every morning, the news sank into my brain, and stayed. Language on the street, on the forbidden television, at the Hayeses' dinners,…all became *my* language, which I learned like a child, from the first words up. The squatting fields of Hasnapur receded fast. (Mukherjee 174)

However, like the nonlinear narration of *Jasmine*, its protagonist Jasmine's transformation is marked by unpredictability. Though she blends into mainstream America, she is well aware of its failings and dark spots. Throughout the whole text, Jasmine's relationship with America is as ambiguous as her view of the country, which is interspersed with bitterness and anguish but also with admiration. This ambiguity is seen in Mukherjee as well. In her essay "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties" she criticizes American immigration policies by declaring that "[s]capegoating of immigrants has been the politicians' easy instant remedy. Hate speeches fill auditoria, bring in mega bucks for those demagogues willing to profit from stirring up racial animosity" (32). She is also critical of the panic Americans feel about immigrants causing a downturn in the American economy. Mukherjee terms this "a fear of the Other" (ibid). Jasmine faces some of these racial issues and local instability during her stay in America. According to Alfonso-Forero, Jasmine encounters an America in the 1980s that is "undergoing drastic political and socioeconomic changes. Post-Vietnam disillusionment, an increase in illegal immigration, and an economic recession provide the backdrop for Jasmine's counter-narrative, the development of a more corporate and diverse United States" (66). Plenty of examples are found in the Iowa part of the novel of how farmers of this area have been facing

financial trouble resulting in frustration that leads to violent incidents such as killing, maiming, and suicide.

Jasmine's constant fear of being recognized as an illegal immigrant, references to the INS, the sordidness of the living condition of other illegal people, and passing remarks about American racism and its role in the Vietnam War, problematize her relationship with the country. Apart from these fears, Jasmine's realization after Wylie falls in love with another man that everything is fickle about Americans comes as a blow to her. Out of frustration, she ruminates that nothing is permanent here, "nothing so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate" (181). It is also to be noted that though fluidity and mutability are celebrated in the novel, and though Jasmine is eager to remake herself repeatedly, the experience itself can be traumatizing. She realizes that her onward movement is something beyond her control but also that she has to go with it irrespective of the consequences. The following words beautifully capture her dilemma and her disposition:

> It is by now only a passing wave of nausea, this response to the speed of transformation, the fluidity of American character and the American landscape. I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I'm on. Down and down I go, where I'll stop, God only knows. (138-39)

Jasmine's unstoppable journey, powered by her greedy wants and reckless hope, makes her a perpetual sojourner, always on the move and never too deeply rooted anywhere. Ralph J. Crane compares Jasmine's westward journey with protagonists of American Westerns, which gestures at a continuation of the adventure instead of culmination of any kind. He comments that the ending of *Jasmine* is open because it "refuses that the future will be stasis. It is a fluid closure which, to borrow Du Plessis's phrase, writes beyond the ending" (Crane n.pag.). The diasporic journey that Jasmine undertakes is in fact based on the course, not the destiny. She will exalt her ongoing movement and not a static destination. In a sense, Jasmine's journey towards California can be compared with Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield's since all three are motivated by a personal impulse of self-actualization. Disillusioned by the double-standard of society, both Huck and Holden seek a free territory. Jasmine's pursuit is, however, not so much related to

disillusionment at moral standards of the world. Her life-experiences have rendered her too mature to lament the loss of innocence. Her journey can be compared with Huck and Holden's quest in the sense that all three of them search for personal freedom, which gives them an opportunity, to live life on their own terms based on their own choices, not others.

(ii) *Queen of Dreams*

While Bharati Mukherjee depicts the new Americans in *Jasmine* to explain the changing contours of American demography, her successors, including Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni from South Asia, continue this legacy but in their own distinctive fashions. In his essay ""Dissolving Boundaries" The Woman as Immigrant in the Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" Robert Ross notes the connection between these two writers and states that Mukherjee is a "biographer of recent immigrants to America…" (248). Somdatta Mandal opines that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "position as a South Asian writer in English is distinct and well established" ("Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" 113). She also holds that most Divakaruni's stories "deal with the experience of immigrants to the United States, …" (ibid). From these comments, one can conclude that the subject matters of both writers overlap thematically, if not stylistically.

However, Divakaruni's fourth novel *Queen of Dreams* (2004) differs from Mukherjee's *Jasmine* stylistically. Like *The Mistress of Spices*, *Queen of Dreams* uses the "the magic realist mode" (Mandal 120). As Tilo of *The Mistress of Spices* solves the problems of her diasporic customers, so does Mrs. Gupta of *Queen of Dreams* by dreaming and interpreting the dreams of others. However, the novel revolves around the life of Mrs. Gupta's daughter Rakhi, whose struggles with the other people of her life and with her unknown Indian heritage is the locus of the novel. The terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 is another important trope of the novel that brings into question the status of Rakhi and her family's citizenship, as well as their rights in the United States. Mandal observes that after this incident "Rakhi's search for identity intensifies" (121).

In an interview with Luan Gaines, a contributory reviewer to the online review site "Curled Up with a Good Book", Divakaruni explains Rakhi's bafflement about her identity by noting that: **"**Rakhi's parents have been atypical in not telling her much about India—which causes her to hunger for it. India becomes looming and mythical in her imagination. Because in some ways she has been denied her heritage, she longs to recreate it for herself" (n.pag.). In this

second section of Chapter Three, Rakhi's quest for identity is studied through concepts of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism.

(a) Mirroring of Postcolonial Feminism in Rakhi of *Queen of Dreams*:

Born and brought up in the United States, Rakhi Gupta cherishes a romanticized view of her parents' homeland. As Divakaruni points out, Rakhi's parents, unlike other immigrant parents, are unwilling to instill Indian culture into their daughter. Unlike typical second-generation immigrant children, however, Rakhi is eager to learn and absorb the native culture that had eluded her earlier due to the reticence of her parents. Divakaruni points out to Gaines that "[Rakhi's] friend Belle, … wants to escape from all the pressure her parents put upon her to be "Indian"" (n.pag.). Rakhi's unusual inquisitiveness about Indian culture creates an ambiguity in her that leads to a fragmented identity, for she is torn between her American present and her Indian past. Early in the text, Rakhi recalls that when she was eight, she wanted to hear stories set in India from her mother since it was "a land that seemed to me to be shaded with unending mystery" (Divakaruni 4). However, the mother never obliged her, saying that "…India wasn't all that mysterious"(ibid).

In studying the character of this American born second-generation Indian woman, this chapter makes use of postcolonial feminism in a specific sense. Since the text of *Queen of Dreams* deals with racial politics from the beginning, it seems pertinent to enquire about how Rakhi's ethnic identity had shaped the formation of her identity in the USA. In the introduction to their anthology *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Reina Lewis, and Sara Mills note how postcolonial feminism promotes a racial view of mainstream feminist theory in order to introduce a "[f]eminist anti-racist politics" that recognizes the differences between women (Lewis and Mills 3). Such anti-racist politics, according to Lewis and Mills, is a reaction against the second wave Anglo-American feminist theory that standardized Western middle-class women's experiences and "developed a form of theorizing-'sisterhood is global'-which assumed that those white concerns were the concerns of women everywhere" (Lewis and Mills 4). The locus of the main argument in this section of Chapter Three is how Rakhi develops as a South Asian in mainstream US society. The story line of *Queen of Dreams* is woven around the racial politics of an America that considers Rakhi, an American citizen by birth, as an Indian, whose identity is deeply rooted not in the country of adaptation, but in the country of origin.

Rakhi's parents were mostly reticent about India in dealing with their growing daughter; the mother, nevertheless, retained many cultural practices within the home space such as wearing saris and cooking Indian food. Rakhi remembers such things by saying "[a]t home we rarely ate anything but Indian; that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture" (Divakaruni 7). She also remembers how her father hummed Hindi songs while doing dishes in the kitchen. Undoubtedly, because of the traditional atmosphere at home Rakhi is tied to her past subconsciously. Later, she chooses Indian themes as the subjects for her paintings like temples, cityscapes, women in a marketplace and bus drivers at lunch. When she was still married to Sonny, Rakhi used to cook elaborate Indian meals, "appetizers, rotis rolled out fresh, rich curries in almond sauce, traditional Indian desserts that required hours of culinary acrobatics" (Divakaruni 12). The most outstanding example of her Indianness is that she and her friend Belle (shortened from Balwant Kaur) named their joint-venture restaurant 'Chai House'. The business of this restaurant is threatened by the launching of an "authentic" American coffee shop named "The Java Chain", a franchise of one of the fastest-growing café chains in America. Symbolically, this coffee shop becomes the binary of Rakhi's Chai House. Faced with its vibrant presence, Rakhi's shop fails to retain its customers. This is a significant phenomenon in Rakhi's growth as a human being because metaphorically the Chai House represented her own fragmented identity.

Rakhi's mother Mrs. Gupta has a special power of dreaming and interpreting truths about other people's life. In addition, she is also a woman of extraordinary sharpness of intellect and wisdom. When Rakhi and Belle seek her help about their falling business, Mrs. Gupta says something that applies equally to Rakhi and the Chai House.

> 'The reason you don't have enough power to fight that woman there is that she knows exactly who she is, and you don't. This isn't a real cha shop'—she pronounces the word in the Bengali way—'but a mishmash, a Westerner's notion of what's Indian. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe if you can make it into something authentic. You'll survive'. (Divakaruni 89)

Since Rakhi could never develop firsthand knowledge about India from her parents, especially her mother, she cherishes a Westerner's notion of what is Indian, a concocted notion that makes

her the person she is. Though she is a second-generation Indian-American born in California, she does not and cannot erase her Indian origin. Rakhi's identity formation is inseparably linked to her past; she cannot form a coherent self unless she too, like the Chai House, can achieve authenticity.

Postcolonial feminism is relevant in assessing Rakhi's character since it allows us to see that in her diasporic life she has to face challenges due to her past experiences. In their essay "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism" Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park opine that "postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights" (53). Therefore, postcolonial feminism is not only confined to colonial backgrounds. It rather encompasses a host of issues such as gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities and the differing circumstances of women's lives. In Rakhi we see all these factors working to form different patterns that shape her identity. For example, she is haunted by the unknown homeland that eludes her yearning of learning more of its mysteries. In fact, Rakhi's inability to learn about India makes it a place of immense mystery and romance to her. When she was in college, Rakhi borrowed a tape full of songs about the Bengal monsoon from its South Asian library. When she asked her parents about the authenticity of the beauty of Bengal monsoon described in the songs, her father disillusioned her by saying that Calcutta city became flooded with every downpour, and people died of cholera in the rainy season. However, this information failed to daunt Rakhi in the end since she thought: "[b]ut I was not fooled. They were hiding things from me, beautiful, mysterious, important things, as they always had" (Divakaruni 82). Her longing for learning Bengali makes Belle consider her to be insane and her repeated attempt to visit India is something her parents disapprove of. However, Rakhi vows to visit India before her death, "if only to lay to rest the ghosts that dance in my head like will-o'-the-wisps over a rippling sea" (Divakaruni 83).

Rakhi's constant struggle to synthesize her American present and Indian past is evident in the fact that both her husband and best friend are of Indian origin, albeit acculturated to the host land. The way Rakhi dresses at an important event of her life like the first exhibition of her paintings at the Atelier is a reminder of the cultural duality she is going through.

> So here I am, dressed in a black sheath of a gown with a slit up the side of one leg and spaghetti straps that live up to their name….The one thing in the ensemble that's mine is

> a gauzy Indian black-and-silver scarf Belle found in the back of my closet. 'Perfect,' she'd crooned, arranging it around my shoulders. 'Just the right fusion of East and West!' (Divakaruni 93)

Like the fusion represented in her dress, Rakhi feels inwardly the strong pull from both her little-known heritage and present. To study the complex strands of Rakhi's character it is necessary to place her in the cultural context she has woven around her. For a better understanding of Third World women, Rajan and Park emphasize the importance of race, class, nationality, religion, and sexualities that "intersect with gender, and the hierarchies, epistemic as well as political, social, and economic, that exist among women" (54). These critics hold that postcolonial feminist critics, like other US women of color, dismiss the idea of the universal woman but do not promote the reification "of the Third World "difference" that produces the "monolithic" Third World woman" (ibid). This observation of Rajan and Park applies in particular to Rakhi's situation as her multi-dimensional personality eschews labels such as "universal" or "monolithic" and encourages an analysis based on her particular subject position as a colored American-Indian woman. It is interesting to note that despite her romanticized view of India, and her yearning to go there one day, Rakhi wishes that after her death she would become part of the Pacific in Northern California. She ruminates on the issue thus, "[i]f I died, I, too, would want my remains to become part of this land, this water, because there's a way in which the geography of one's childhood makes its way into one's bones" (Divakaruni 133,134). This co-existence of an inherent contradiction in her, her yearning to embrace both the known present and the unknown past marks Rakhi's identity as unique. It is neither like a white American's nor like her first-generation immigrant parents. She is even different from Belle who does not fantasize India the way Rakhi does. Her disposition can be categorized as "transnational feminism", to borrow a phrase from Rajan and Park. According to them, transnational feminism shares "major concerns, subject matter, theoretical interests, and political agendas with what is commonly understood to be postcolonial feminism even though it does not explicitly deal with colonialism; it is, however, centrally engaged with its successor, neocolonialism" (57). Afterwards, the competition Rakhi's Chai House fails to withstand comes from a neocolonial agent, the Java Chain Coffee shop. Later in the narrative, the treatment Rakhi and her family get from some Americans after 9/11, also

reminds the reader of the neocolonial racial conflicts in that traumatized diasporic American space.

Rakhi's Chai House lacked authenticity, says her mother Mrs. Gupta. The narrative reveals that business picks up when Rakhi's father takes charge of it and gives it an Indian as well as an international texture. It is interesting to observe how Rakhi as a person develops in a manner parallel to the shifting identity of the restaurant. Divakaruni gives an account of Rakhi's mutation in her interview with Luan Gaines in the following words: "[s]he needs to stop blaming others, first of all. She needs to find her "voice" as an artist. She needs to learn to feel OK about unsolved mysteries. She needs to forgive and trust again. I think she learns all of these, to some extent, as the book goes along" (n.pag.). In fact, Rakhi undergoes a series of changes that bring about a significant change in her relationship with the other people in her life. Such changes in a person's identity are considered natural in the postmodern feminist view of identity construction. Therefore, the next section analyzes her mutability in the light of postmodern feminism.

(b) Divakaruni's Protagonist and Postmodern Feministic Aspects

The restaurant that Rakhi and Belle set up used to sell mainly cookies and coffee. When Rakhi's father takes over the restaurant, he suggests turning it into an Indian snack shop, "…a chaer dokan, as it would be called in Calcutta" (Divakaruni 165). However, the shop would have "…a few American sanitary touches thrown in" (ibid). There is a parallelism here between the ways the restaurant is transformed and the manner in which Rakhi acquires a new identity. It is noticeable that the instability that marks Rakhi's character at the beginning of the novel changes into a comparatively more settled down disposition in the middle part of the narrative. Her longing for India and romanticized vision of the unknown country starts getting solidity to some degrees as the teashop gradually picks up business. Rakhi's growth is parallel to the teashop in the sense that as the shop assumes a hybrid quality, so do the disparate parts of her identity for they reached a state where her present and past enmesh into a harmonious whole. Since her father starts telling her stories about real India as they work together to give the restaurant a new shape, the fantasy she weaves around the country is gradually lifted to be replaced by reality. The following sentences show Rakhi's feelings about the reconciliation of her two selves:

> Now, finally, she has a way to bring it all into her own American life. She'll resuscitate the Chai House with the tastes and smells of the old country, with the whispers of stories learned by heart. Something else is being resuscitated−between her and her father, though she's not sure what shape it will ultimately take. (Divakaruni 172)

Rakhi's introspection here indicates how she plans to integrate the two sides of her identity as an Asian-American by bridging the Asian past with her own American present. In the book *American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora* Sunil Bhatia characterizes this integration by saying that diasporic people's negotiation with multiple cultural sites is "fluid, dynamic, interminable, and often unstable" (219). Bhatia terms the fluidity of identity as a "polyphony" of different voices that "constructs and shapes the Indian acculturation experience as fluid, dynamic, contextual, contingent, and not fixed and singular as reflected in the universal and linear concepts of marginalization, integration, and separation" (ibid). It is noticeable that Bhatia's terms "fluid, dynamic, contingent, not fixed and singular" describing the cultural identity of South-Asian Americans suits Rakhi well. These very terms coincide with postmodern identity construction that promotes fragmentation as opposed to coherence and solidity.

Postmodern identity construction, as well as postmodern feminism, speaks in favor of plurality. Rakhi's shifting identity can be read as an example of the kind of female self that defies compartmentalization. From around 1980, a section of feminist studies tended to reject the project of grand social theory in favor of specific, concrete inquiries into the causes of gender bias. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson observe that in the 1980s socially outcast groups like poor and working-class women, women of color, and lesbians insisted on their inclusion in mainstream feminist discourse. Pressure from such diverse female groups paved the way for a more accommodating feminist theory, or what Fraser and Nicholson term "Postmodern Feminism" (34). These critics maintain that a postmodern-feminist theory "would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods" (ibid). Thus a postmodern female subject has to be studied in the specific context of her position in society at a certain period of history. Rakhi's identity has to be explored, keeping in mind her racial and cultural backgrounds. In the *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni explores issues of race and culture by placing side by side the two restaurants, the Kurma House (former Chai House) and "Java Chain Coffee shop",

establishments representing two different cultures and histories. Rakhi and her family represent a culture and history that differ from mainstream American culture. To study her struggle as an Asian-American business woman, Rakhi's situation can be evaluated in the light of postmodern feminism since it takes into consideration the ideas of diversity and difference.

The opening day of the Kurma House comes as a revealing day for Rakhi because she undergoes a profound self-realization on that occasion. She analyzes the customers who come to their restaurant ambivalently:

> Some wear Western clothes, and some are in kurta-pajamas, but what I notice most are their faces. Lined, unabashedly showing their age, they hint at eventful pasts lived in places very different from this one, difficulties and triumphs I can't quite imagine. The word *foreign* comes to me again, though I know it's ironic. They're my countrymen. We share the same skin color. (Divakaruni 194)

Divakaruni deftly utilizes Rakhi's contradictory feelings here to reveal her fragmented identity. Rakhi feels like both an American and an Indian here. The ambiguity she expresses reveals her divided, plural identity, so common in a postmodern world. At the same time, India is close and distant from her, and her American identity is a strong but elusive part of her.

In the first part of the novel, Rakhi remains too anxious to discover her ancestral home, and hence becomes restless and dissatisfied. However, with her father's help in the form of stories and translation of her mother's dream journals, she is able to give solid shape to her imagination. On the other hand, the Kurma House evolves into a symbol of international culture, for the customers that visit the place are a mix of various races. They induce in her the realization that it is not essential to belong to a particular culture; rather, it is alright to accommodate multiple cultures within a single identity. Therefore, she feels "a warm expansiveness … a sense of many blessings" in her mind and sends "a kind thought to the blond manager" of Java chain without any bitterness (Divakaruni198).

The serenity Rakhi achieves coincides with the vision of postmodern feminism as adumbrated by Fraser and Nicholson. These thinkers speculate that the most important advantage of postmodern-feminism is "its usefulness for contemporary feminist political practice" (35). This theory promotes "alliances" rather than "unity around a universally shared interest or

identity" (ibid). Postmodern feminism acknowledges that women's needs and experiences are diversified; therefore their needs cannot be single. It also recognizes that even the common interests and enemies are not universal; rather such commonalities are "interlaced with differences, even with conflicts" (ibid).

By making peace with her plural identity, Rakhi incorporates a diasporic sensibility in her identity that helps her overcome familial and racial conflicts that mar her inner and outer life. From a cynical, obsessed person she gradually becomes an adaptable, hopeful woman who has internalized diasporic fluidity. The lessening of rigidity in her character leads to her reconciliation with her estranged husband Sonny. The life-changing 9/11 events, instead of devastating her, recreates her persona. Rakhi now learns to trust and depend on others after realizing that living in isolation does not solve problems. The violent event also helps her see herself in a transnational racial context. The next part of the present chapter construes all these issues by seeing Rakhi's identity from the viewpoint of diasporic feminism.

(c) Woman in the Diaspora: Always in the Flux

> There's a strange attraction to the thought of swerving from all the problematic roles of her life (insecure mother, needy friend, blocked painter, stumbling businesswoman, blind dreamer, grudging daughter, possessive ex-wife) into an unknown space, an unforeseen being. (Divakaruni 200)

In *Queen of Dreams,* Rakhi mentions a series of identities she possesses within herself. The postmodern turn in her character enables her to juggle all these roles, albeit with little satisfaction. The last segment of the novel marks a final shift in her character that contains diasporic fluidity. This fluidity noticeably makes her more adaptable to changing circumstances. The last few pages of the novel chronicle how she overcomes her past by visiting the night club where Sonny works as DJ. Rakhi's blending in the multi-racial crowd of the club symbolizes her acceptance of a diasporic identity that crosses over to the other side and out of her comfort zone. Previously, the horror of 9/11 and its consequence, an attack, on their restaurant make Rakhi aware of her transnational, racially "other" subject position. In a word, the last part of *Queen of Dreams* narrates the remaking of Rakhi in the wake of a series of life-changing events that take place at the personal and national level.

In his book *American Karma: Race, Culture, and identity in the Indian Diaspora*, Sunil Bhatia takes a sustained look at racial ambivalence, acculturation and cultural hybridity in the US-Indian diaspora. He opines that concepts such as race, class, and gender are "intricately woven into the fabric of cultures and that their meanings are recreated in the diasporic spaces" (231). Bhatia also explicates the process of diasporic identity formation in the present world, noting that how diasporas are turning into transnational communities where First and Third world spaces merge to create hybrid identities. He also notes that the movement of "highly skilled labor, people, ideas, commodities, and artifacts across international borders have led to new configurations of culture and self" (231). The new configuration broadens the concept of identity and increases its elasticity. The diasporic subject lets go of the watertight compartmentalization of her/his multiple cultural selves to form an inclusive self. In Rakhi's case, her mother's dream journals also help her become accommodating by showing her the path to be avoided. The mother makes a difficult choice of leaving back her job of dream interpretation in India to migrate to America after marriage, a forbidden act for dream tellers. To the last day of her life, Mrs. Gupta suffers for being unable to reconcile her two selves and for trying too hard to keep separate the two opposite strands of her life. However, Rakhi chooses to accommodate both her love and art, by embracing a life that is quite opposite to her mother's, that is to say, a life of elasticity and fluidity. In other words, she embraces a life where it is possible to keep multiple selves within a single being through trust and adjustments.

Two disasters in Rakhi's life play a pivotal role in remaking her identity in the course of the novel *Queen of Dreams*. However, the impact of the second disaster, the tragedy of 9/11, surpasses the first one, the fire that broke out in Kurma House. After the incident, the customers of Kurma House start bringing in different souvenirs to redecorate the restaurant. Tibetan, Persian, African, Afghanistani and Russian antiques keep filling up the restaurant till Rakhi feels that she "quite like[s] the creature it [the restaurant] has become, this many-chambered nautilus" (Divakaruni 240). She even adds the word "international" to the name of the restaurant. Rakhi's acceptance of so many cultures indicates that she has become a diasporic subject who has no particular bias for any single culture.

The second and deathly disaster of 9/11, resulting from the destruction of the World Trade Center in a terrorist attack, induces a life-changing experience in Rakhi. When they open the restaurant after the attack Rakhi refuses to put up an American flag, saying that she does not

want to show off her love for America under pressure by displaying it. Soon after its re-opening, the restaurant is attacked by some American men who badly injure Jespal and Sonny. Afterwards, Rakhi ruminates that when one of the men had said "You ain't no American". She had tried to dismiss him by calling him "a racist idiot". However, she questions herself "[b]ut if I wasn't an American, then what was I?" (Divakaruni 271). She feels that she has lost the sense of belonging she had previously. Her feeling of insecurity about her identity is further intensified over the next few days when she gets e-mails circulated by Indian organizations. She cannot make up her mind whether she should pray to an American or Indian deity and feels like a guest in America, the country of her birth, when sympathetic Americans welcome her presence in their community. In an interview, Divakaruni said that she wrote *Queen of Dreams* after 9/11 to generate compassion in people for others. "I want to touch people, to have them think about issues they haven't considered before, to make them more compassionate towards other people," she says. "That was my major intention with writing this book after 9/11: If I could make the pain and the hope powerful enough in the book, then maybe I might stop some of the prejudice out there, and have some sort of countereffect to what followed 9/11." Her heroine Rakhi seeks hope through pain in the novel and in the process develops a new diasporic identity that is flexible and accommodating.

In the last chapter of the novel, Rakhi visits the club where Sonny plays as the DJ. She finds a mixed-up crowd there. The music brings for her "a déjà vu of cultural memory she hadn't expected to find here" (Divakaruni 303). Her blending in the crowd of the club and enjoying the multicultural music proves her openness to the hybridity that is so integral to diasporic subjectivity. In her essay "Identity Dub: The Paradoxes of an Indian American Youth Subculture (New York Mix)" Sunaina Maira gives an in-depth account of how the bhangra club nights promote the kind of Indian American Youth Subculture that can create "a new site for the collision of identity politics and the marketing of ethnic styles" (30). Maira analyzes this element of the second-generation popular culture with a view to linking it "to the specific identity questions that loom large for second-generation Indian Americans and in locating these two dimensions in particular historical and cultural contexts" (ibid). She goes on to say that the fusion of music sometimes extends to a performance of culturally hybrid styles like the use of bindi or a dot on the forehead and an Indian-style nose ring with hip-hop.

The ecstasy Rakhi feels in dancing with music that is a mixture of an old Indian song with electronica and voices in another language gives her a freeing sensation and energizes her with a vitality that seems to emanate from the center of the room. Maira's allusion to Simon Frith illustrates how music can reshape the identity of youth by creating a hybrid space where they can "reappropriate or symbolically transgress existing racial, gendered, and class boundaries" (34). Maira reaffirms Frith's concept by saying that Indian American youths take "musical remixes and urban fashion" as objects with which it is possible to "construct, and display, a seemingly hybrid identity that symbolically juxtaposes Indian and urban American popular cultures" (37). Maira's belief that such objects can help in identity formation is reminiscent of Dick Hebdige's essay "Subculture: The Meaning of Style" where he argues that the punks of the 1960s used objects and music to affirm their lifestyles. Hebdige's main argument centered around the process through which "objects are made to mean and mean again as "style" in subculture" (1259). Following Hebdige, Maira also holds that music and other cultural elements play a part in the identity formation of second-generation Indian Americans. She argues that the subculture of Indian American youth adopts both the authentic and hybrid elements of musical remixes and other cultural components to create an identity that defies the "old binaries of essentialization and hybridity while still being able to encompass both these possibilities as aspects of the lived realities of social actors" (53). Divakaruni finishes *Queen of Dreams* with her heroine's self-discovery in the bhangra dance club to suggest a similar kind of transcendence. Rakhi encompasses both essentialization and hybridity but is capable of avoiding being stuck within these identity markers; she is the new woman who is prepared to explore new horizons of self-definition.

(iii) *The Lowland*

Gauri Mitra is an American immigrant from India as well as a brilliant professor of Philosophy in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. She embodies the concept of an unconventional femininity that is different from Jasmine and Rakhi, the other two characters studied earlier in this chapter. Gauri's character goes against the usual traits of Indian women of her time, that is to say, of the 1960s-70s. Gauri reverses the role of a wife and a mother by embracing the role of an individual devoted to academic pursuits and personal achievements. In a further reversal of gender role, she embraces lesbianism at a certain stage of her life. Although

it is difficult to study Gauri's character from a postcolonial perspective since she retains almost nothing from her past in her diasporic life in the USA, her character contains elements that reveal a new woman who embodies aspects of transnational feminism.

In his enlightening essay "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Neo cosmopolitan Fiction" Binod Paudyal argues that it is plausible to study the South Asian diaspora in the United States by reappraising it in the light of that which is "responsive to an age of migration, mobility, and transnational connections"(15). In his bid to study *The Lowland* as neo-cosmopolitan fiction Paudyal resorts to Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma's formulation of the term "neo-cosmopolitanism" in their anthology, *New Cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the US.* The concept of new cosmopolitanism is used in this last section of Chapter Three along with the idea of transnational feminism developed by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan to understand Gauri's character.

Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma distinguish between traditional diasporas and the new cosmopolitanism by stating that the latter "results from the confluence of globalization (race, migration, media, money, and culture)…" (2).These critics opine that new cosmopolitan subjects are not confined to a particular nation-state or class. Such subjects "instead [occupy] a range of fluid subject positions, which can be trans-class, trans-local with competing value systems" (ibid). While the character of Gauri tends to fit easily in the category of new cosmopolitanism, the first section of the last segment of Chapter Three attempts to find out occasional reversion to her past that she otherwise tries to avert habitually.

Modern postcolonial studies focus on transnational aspects of globalization to find out how earlier postcolonial thought has transformed into transnationalism. In the introduction to her book, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* Ania Loomba comments that postcolonialism now faces new challenges raised by globalization, the increased threats on the environment, and recent symptoms of global economic crises. The author illustrates her point by noting that globalization does not heavily depend on the center-margin discourse of postcolonial studies; rather, its locus is the porosity of geographical borders and transnational networks. While these themes were familiar to postcolonial critics in the past, they have been thinking in a different key lately. However, holds Loomba, any study on globalization has to "incorporate some of the key insights of postcolonial studies, especially its historical awareness of past forms of empire and the structural connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism" (16). In fact, postcolonial

discourse is now interspersed with transnational issues such as the "inequities" that exist among global "economy, politics, and culture" (ibid). Loomba's point about postcolonialism's newer form is echoed in Arif Dirlik's essay "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism". Dirlik opines that the differences between the First and Third Worlds are now intermingled, and so the binary oppositions between the First and Third Worlds should now be reconsidered. Dirlik observes that the postcolonial subject now has a kind of "hybridness" or "in-betweenness" "that is not to be contained within fixed categories or binary oppositions" (336).

Both Loomba and Dirlik argue that in today's world, both the terms "postcolonialism" and "postcolonial subjectivity" have become transnational and fluid. As a postcolonial subject, Gauri's character can be analyzed in the light of postcolonial feminism when linked with transnational feminist issues. In the following section Gauri's identity formation is traced within the framework of postcolonial feminist theory.

(a)Mirroring of Postcolonial Feminism in Gauri:

Gauri Mitra is one of the major characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland.* She travels from India to the United States with her brother-in-law turned second husband. She was first married to Udayan, the younger of two brothers and a Naxalite[3]. After he was killed by the police the elder brother Subhash marries the pregnant Gauri and takes her to Rhode Island. When in Calcutta, in her unmarried days, Gauri had been living an independent life. Separated from her parents at an early age, she and her brother Manash had lived in their grandfather's house in Calcutta while their parents lived in a rural area. When she was sixteen, her parents had died in a car accident. Lahiri makes Gauri into a person who did not have a strong bonding with anyone until she fell in love with Udayan. When this bonding is severed after Udayan's death, Gauri fails to connect with anyone else afterward, including with her own daughter Bela. Therefore, it is noteworthy that from the beginning Lahiri depicts Gauri as an emotionally aloof and withdrawn person.

[3] A Naxal or Naxalite is a member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The term Naxal derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origin. Naxalites are considered far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist).

In the book *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* Inderpal Grewal observes how in the United States gendered subjects are produced in relation to race, class, caste, and other social formations. She emphasizes the point that choice plays a significant role in shaping "a central ethical framework for feminist as well as neoliberal consumer practices and the imbrication of feminism with consumer culture" (*Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* 3). Grewal also notes that the gendered bodies are differentiated from each other according to their geographical location, within which race, class, religion, and nationality are considered meaningful in shaping identity. The author wonders what possibilities feminism might have within the "neoliberalism" of the US and what kind of "cosmopolitan knowledge" would be produced in the "neoliberal conditions" since the feminists working in such situation have to assume changing and contingent subject positions in order to avoid being "incapacitated by this neoliberalism "(*Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* 3-4). Thus, observes Grewal, feminists within America create many kinds of agency and diverse subjects by embracing changing and contingent subject positions. However, notes Grewal, the freedom of choosing one's agency is not innocent of older imperial histories. The newer disciplinary formations in many countries of the world are also derived from their imperial pasts. Therefore, American neoliberalism paradoxically offers both freedom and restriction visible in Gauri Mitra's recourse to her postcolonial past.

Although Gauri renounces her traditional role as a wife and a mother by leaving behind her husband and daughter to pursue the role of an independent academic, there are moments when she attempts to reconnect with her past and feels the urge to recuperate the ties she has willingly torn. She avoids getting into contact with her mentor Professor Otto Weiss, thinking that he would lose his respect for her if he came to know of her decision of working rather than raising her child. She always carries during flights the embroidered turquoise shawl that her husband Subhash gave her before their marriage. She has impractically chosen to remain a citizen of her birthplace though she knows that "for the sake of simplifying the end of her life, she would need to become an American" (Lahiri 235). Gauri feels that her job and her individual lifestyle, as well as her need to become an American, are all "a betrayal of everything he [Udayan] had believed in" (Lahiri 234). She feels connected to her past in some external ways because she realizes that

> …she remained, in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests, a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable and, against the backdrop of most of America, still unconventional. She continued to introduce herself by an unusual name, the first given by her parents, the last by two brothers she had wed. (Lahiri 236)

Gauri also experiences some racial slights from people who continue to ask her where she was from. Once a driver sent from the university to pick her up for giving a talk, misunderstood her for the person paid to open another person's door. Aspects of her appearance like her complexion as well as her accent connect her to her past, but unmistakably internally too; she is irremediably connected to the past from which she has cut herself off deliberately. For example, when on the roof of a hotel she meets an elderly Indian couple taking care of a little boy, she suddenly wants "to align herself with this couple" and tells them that she is waiting to be a grandmother (285). Her coming to Rhode Island to hand over the divorce papers to Subhash is another attempt to reweave the snapped tie between her and Bela. "Ultimately, she had come seeking Bela. She'd come to ask about Bela's life, to ask Subhash if she might contact her now" (306). It is interesting to note that after being renounced by Bela, Gauri chooses to go to Calcutta and attempts suicide at a local hotel, though she restrains herself at the last moment from doing so.

Since this dissertation interprets postcolonialism as a diasporic person's nostalgia and bonding to her past, it is possible to say in this context that Gauri, an apparently assimilated diasporic woman, retains some of her ties to her past. Her identity cannot be fully explained without a study of this connection that she consciously or unconsciously maintains with her past. Since Gauri is a "translated" person, in the sense that her acculturation in the host country is something she has opted for, her identity can be best explained as an example of a version of "postcolonial cosmopolitanisms" as defined by Inderpal Grewal. This makes a subject transnational in the sense that they, instead of feeling obligated to a single nation, feel connected to the whole universe. However, they cannot fully ignore their ties with their own nation and culture.

In the book *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* Grewal defines three types of identities diasporic people may possess in the age of "transnational

connectivities" (*Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* 36). By this term, Grewal indicates the flows of goods, capital, labour, and knowledges that reveal "continuities and discontinuities with older colonial formations" (ibid). Grewal defines three distinct, yet overlapping categories of identity formation in the following words:

> The first was the discourse of the universal or global subject; the second, that of the national or local subject as separate and distinct and different; and the third, the hyphenated, hybrid subject straddling the first two formations. (36)

Gauri's identity represents the third category mentioned in Grewal's categorization. She notes that people of this category possess an identity that is sometimes resistant to the nation-state and sometimes assimilable to it. She is conscious of the fact that her living and working in the capitalist United States go against the ideals for which Udayan sacrificed his life. Perhaps her retaining Indian nationality is one way of redeeming herself. However, she is assimilated into the host culture in a number of ways.

Gauri's utilization of the internet to search about Bela and the Naxalbari movement is an example of "transnational connectivities" that enable people like her to hold multiple nationalisms and identities "as well as to shift from one to the other"(Grewal 37). Grewal maintains that these connectivities make it possible for diasporic subjects to assimilate race, gender, class, caste, and nationalisms "to create some divergent versions of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms" (ibid).

In *The Lowland*, Gauri Mitra preserves multiple subject positions from the very beginning of her appearance in the narrative. She is born outside Calcutta but lives there with her extended family. Therefore, she is both an insider and outsider in her grandparents' house. From a devoted student of Philosophy at Presidency, she becomes the doting wife of Udayan and a docile daughter-in-law in the Mitra house. After being widowed she marries for the second time to become the wife of her brother-in-law Subhash. Giving birth to Bela makes her a mother, but she soon rejects this role by again devoting herself to studies. Ultimately, her career empowers her to live on her own, and she disowns the roles of a wife and a mother. The capable professional and brilliant academic that she becomes mark yet another transformation for Gauri. Lesbianism opens up a new dimension of her identity, but coming back to Bela reveals yet another surprising turn in her development. All these multiple, often contradictory, roles that she

plays are construed within the theoretical framework of postmodern feminism in the next portion of this chapter.

(b) Lahiri's Protagonist Reflecting Postmodern Feministic Aspects

One of the major characters of Lahiri's *The Lowland,* Gauri Mitra displays a number of identity traits that conform to some features of postmodern female identity formation as upheld by a number of theorists. Among them, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan explore the issues of postmodern feminism and globalization in their book *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices.* By the phrase "scattered hegemonies" Grewal describes subjects that are produced as a result of mobile capital, transnational culture, and multiple subjectivities that replace the notion of a unitary subject. Her book makes us realize that postmodern subjects are not separable from questions of race, transnational culture, and global economy. These aspects form the agency of postmodern subjectivity in a transnational world that is conducive to fragmented or scattered states of being for postmodern subjects.

The argument presented by Grewal and Kaplan can also be found in other critics. Among them, Gayatri Gopinath is relevant in the context of the present discussion. In the essay "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexuality in Motion" Gopinath suggests how an important body of feminist criticism engages itself with the compliance of nationalist discourse with gender hierarchies. These feminist critics reveal how women are enshrined as both "the symbolic center and boundary marker of the nation" in the nationalistic discourse of different cultures (262). Gopinath observes that whereas many critical works have been formulated on the analysis of women's emblematic performance as homemakers of a nation, "much less attention has been paid to the production and deployment of non-heteronormative, or "queer," sexuality within colonial, anti-colonial nationalist, and contemporary nationalist discourses" (263). Gopinath believes that heterosexuality of the female subject is presumed as normative in discourses of nationalism and women's sexuality. Therefore, within the familial and domestic space of the nation as an imagined community, "non-heteronormative sexuality is either criminalized, or disavowed and elided" (ibid).

The pivotal character of Gauri Mitra in *The Lowland* reverses a number of traditional gender roles from the beginning of her appearance in the narrative that culminates in her sexual relationship with Lorna, a research student whom she supervises. Gauri's switching of gender roles after coming to Rhode Island as Subhash's wife began with her withdrawing herself to the

bedroom when Subhash was preparing their meals. It continued even after the birth of her daughter Bela, whom she often left home alone for walks. Gauri's refusal to conform to the role of a wife and mother climaxes with her leaving the house to take up a teaching job at California during one of Bela and Subhas's trip to India. In such actions, Gauri reveals tracts of a postmodern feminist subject located in a transnational space. About being a diasporic queer South Asian, Gopinath notes that such a subject "occupies a place of impossibility, in that not only is she excluded from these various "home" spaces but, quite literally, she simply cannot be imagined" (265).

Gopinath's words reverberate those of the postmodern feminist critics Judith Butler and Adrienne Rich when these critics discuss the question of lesbianism in two of their seminal works. Butler in *Gender Trouble* notes that transsexual subjects appear to be invisible in certain cultures since political and cultural laws in those societies establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Butler notes that: "indeed, precisely because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain" (*Gender Trouble* 24). In her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" Rich also talks about the nonexistence of queer females by observing that lesbians have always been denied existence in history. They have been considered "as female versions of male homosexuality" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 28). Thus female reality is erased by the inclusion of lesbianism in male homosexuality. All critics agree on the proposition that lesbianism has always been excluded and hidden from the political, cultural, and legal frameworks of different societies. Judged from their perspective, Gauri Mitra of *The Lowland* can be thought of as inhabiting a secluded place in society where she can keep her sexual identity hidden. It is mentioned in the text that she is aware of the fact that "[i]t would have been a scandal if anyone detected what was going on" (Lahiri 241).

Gauri compares the reversion of her role from lover to colleague of Lorna with the other changes in roles she has willingly brought over herself. She summarizes these upheavals of her life in these words:

> It was not unlike the way her role had changed at so many other points in the past. From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman…She had

> generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end. (Lahiri 240)

Butler and Rich, as well as Gopinath, note that a queer woman is nonexistent in society; likewise, Gauri conforms to social norm by choosing to hide her identity. Ironically, as a result of the reversal of her normative gender role, she is secluded and lonely in the end. As a true postmodern subject, Gauri possesses multiple, and even an unstable identity, that is marked by mutable gender and societal roles. By going back to Grewal and Kaplan, we can situate Gauri's subject position in the transnational context as opposed to that of "the European unitary subject" (*Scattered Hegemonies:* 7). Grewal and Kaplan view postmodernism as a political discourse that forms a significant part of transnational culture. In Grewal's words, mobile capitals and multiple subjectivities produce "scattered hegemonies" and postmodernism is the cultural expression of this term. Viewed thus, the postmodern diasporic subject Gauri is part of this scattered hegemony whose identity is marked by multiplicity and instability.

(c) Woman in the Diaspora: Always in the Flux

This last section of Chapter Three studies Gauri Mitra's identity formation as a diasporic woman in the United States who re-visions Lahiri's usual depiction of first-generation South Asian female characters who accommodate tradition and modernity. Unlike Ashima Ganguli of Lahiri's much-discussed first novel *The Namesake,* Gauri subverts the idea of a diasporic Indian family in order to live her own life as a devoted careerist and academic woman. Her forsaking of Subhash and Bela is something that turns the idea of a close-knit family upside down. This shocking decision deconstructs the traditional idea of a first-generation diasporic South Asian woman's identity and signals a new era of cosmopolitanism. The complex identity formation of Gauri makes her a new diasporic Indian woman in the United States.

The story of Gauri's arrival in the United States after her postgraduate student husband has settled down in it is different from most of the other homesick housewives from India. After attending a party with other Indians at Narasimhan's place, a senior of Subhash in the same university, Gauri declares that she has nothing in common with the other expatriate Indian women and so does not want to keep in touch with them anymore. Shortly after the party she cuts off her hair and destroys her Indian outfits and replaces them with Western ones such as

slacks and sweaters. In fact, Gauri's outward transformation signals a deeper divide in her that keeps her apart from the typical diasporic women of her own country. Her extraordinary childhood of freedom and a life spent apart from her family has taught her to be aloof and introverted from the very beginning. The only possibility of her change of disposition died with Udayan as she cocooned herself even more firmly after his death. Therefore, diasporic life does not imply nostalgia and homesickness for Gauri; neither does it bring the blessing of a new life for her. The void inside her is too deep to be touched or fulfilled. It has been there even before she met Udayan. Gauri is a person who is always already alone, and unable to connect with the others around her. This is something Subhash's mother had predicted correctly about her by noting that: "[s]he's too withdrawn, too aloof to be a mother" (Lahiri 114).

Both Gauri's inner and outer selves find comfort in an existence that does not require intimacy of any kind. Nevertheless, she can bear to remain at the edge of community life, letting its bustle graze her only enough to feel herself professionally needed. She believes that with her life in California she had entered a new world. This life allows her to form temporary relationships with students and colleagues, relationships that never strike their roots deep and never claim a part of her soul. She engages in sporadic love relations, sometimes more than one at the same time, but always remains impersonal about them, taking them as passing matters. In such an existence Gauri feels that if she wished she could be virtually connected to anyone or anything without getting closer to them. She also feels that her virtual presence on the internet is something inevitable: "[s]he cannot avoid it; she is a member of the virtual world, an aspect of her visible on the new sea that has come to dominate the earth's surface" (Lahiri 276). Gauri's sense of her new self indicates the emergence of a new kind of diasporic subject who is, in Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma's words, a "new cosmopolitan" who "occupies a range of fluid subject positions, which can be trans-class, trans-local with competing value systems" (2).

In the essay "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Neo-Cosmopolitan Fiction" Binod Paudyal observes that "Gauri represents a new cosmopolitan subject of the twenty-first century, the new millennium characterized by global capitalism and global forms of travel, technology, and communication" (28). She problematizes the traditional categories of home and belonging because her willingly chosen subject position is fluid. She "stays home in California, but she is a moving diaspora, positioning herself between multiple places, particularly through the virtual world" (ibid). Paudyal's study of Gauri's character is

based on the concept of cosmopolitan subject formations characterized by a host of critics, some of whom have been made use of in the context of the present dissertation to reinforce the identity of Gauri as a redefined new woman of contemporary South Asian diaspora in the United States.

A relevant point to be considered regarding Gauri's identity is thereby her subject position that empowers her in diasporic space. It is obvious that her academic achievements and subsequent professional success are directly connected to her migration to, and stay in America. However, given her temperament, it can be conjectured that she would not be able to continue performing the role of a docile housewife anywhere in the world. Again, her innate sense of isolation would not allow her to be spiritually connected to anyone around her. In this sense, Gauri seems to be a migrant bound to live a dissociated life, not only in a geographical sense, but also in the psychological sense. The United States provides her with the opportunity to respond to the urge for dispersal that is already within her. She is merely externalizing her internal mobility as a diasporic subject. However, it is also important to note that the United States has created a space for her where she can cater to the country's requirement. Seen from this viewpoint, Gauri's diasporic existence seems to be an effect of both personal effort and external stimulations. Therefore the tag "neo-cosmopolitan" is appropriate for her, where we remember that Rajan and Sharma (2006) invest this term with transnational movements caused by both personal and external motivations. It is also possible to include Arjun Appadurai's (2003) idea of "ethnoscape and technoscape" within Rajan and Sharma's concept of neo-cosmopolitanism to theorize the lived experience of Gauri Mitra. After all, all these critics uphold the significance of different kinds of mobility of diasporic people.

Appadurai uses the term "ethnoscape" to define the consciousness of mobile persons who have had a notable effect on global politics. He suggests that these people "can never afford to let their imagination rest too long, even if they wish to" (32). He believes that behind diasporic people's movement, factors like the shifting needs of international capital, and shifting policies on refugee populations, play a big role. As for technoscapes, the critic observes that now both mechanical and informational technology moves at a high speed "across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (ibid). Gauri's life in California is informed by ideas that Appadurai has drawn, since her lived experience as a diasporic subject is inspired by the kind of ethno and technoscapes he has talked about. The first scape allows her existence as a moving

subject as an Indian academic in the USA, whereas the second one enables her to straddle boundaries in the reality of a virtual world.

The present chapter has read three female characters portrayed by three different writers to explore their identity formation with the help of three different lenses. Although these writers share a common ethnical identity, the rendition of the fictional characters is impressively unique. As conduits of the writers, the characters attract the readers with their immense variety and lives full of unexpected bends. These three characters reflect developments in the South Asian diasporic community in the United States. Due to numerous shifts in international politics and economics, concepts like postcolonialism, postmodernism, and diaspora have been taking newer forms. Identity formation of people in this changing state of affairs is not static either. Therefore, Jasmine, Rakhi, and Gauri, all represent distinctive states of diasporic existence in Mukherjee, Divakaruni, and Lahiri's novels. In this chapter, contemporary theoretical concepts such as "transnationalism" and "neo-cosmopolitanism" have been made use of to capture the mutability of concepts, such as postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminisms. Within this theoretical framework, the identity formation of Jasmine, Rakhi, and Gauri has been analyzed to observe how the idea of a new South Asian diasporic woman emerges from the unfolding of their inimitable subjectivities.

Chapter Four

In the Light of Diaspora and Feminism: the Mutability of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Women Characters

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The present chapter, as well as the preceding and the next, that is to say, Chapter Three and Five, begin with a discussion of the bio-bibliographical information available on the three diasporic Indian women writers who practically embody postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminisms in their lives and works. All three share more or less a common background and lead diasporic lives in the USA. Having been born to Bengali parents, all three share common cultural traits and ethnic identities. Similarly, having chosen to live the life of immigrants in the United States, they encounter some common issues concerning South Asian migrants. Yet again, the thematic choice of many of their writings center around immigrant women's lives, their desires, aspirations and search for identity. These affinities allow us to see Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri's works from the same platform. The similarities between the situations of these three Bengali-American writers enable us to compare and contrast their lives and works. However, for the sake of intensive analysis, this fourth chapter only discusses *Arranged Marriage*, a short story collection by Divakaruni. The next chapter discusses *Unaccustomed Earth*, a short story collection by Lahiri.

Since this chapter views Divakaruni's diasporic female characters through postcolonial feminist lens, it is imperative now to explore how the theoretical frame can contextualize *Arranged Marriage*. Postcolonial feminism, as discussed in the previous chapter, upholds the significance of race in connection with feminist issues to perceive the struggle of women from previously colonized nations, especially in the context of the first world. One important tenet of postcolonial feminism is to resist the monolithic representation of postcolonial women in the western academy, irrespective of their historical, cultural, and social contingencies. A second concern of postcolonial feminism is to identify neocolonial designs within the frame of globalization. Transnational feminism deals with issues that arise from neocolonial practices of the metropolises of the modern world. Many of these issues reflect residual effects of colonialism. Another major conflict studied in postcolonial feminism is the question of tradition versus modernity that places postcolonial female subject vis-à-vis the change of identity. The

present section studies some female characters from *Arranged Marriage* from the perspective of postcolonial feminism.

Throughout this textual study, the female characters' identity formation is analyzed with the help of postcolonial and postmodern feminist and diaspora theories, which have been introduced and discussed to some extent in the previous chapter. The present chapter concentrates on the analysis of some female characters from Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*, with the help of frequent references to the theoretical foundations created in Chapter Two.

The woman characters of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri are emblematic of feminist issues as their protagonists struggle continually in adapting to the United States. Their tales are complex because of the pull of the past, which is to say from tradition, as well as from thoughts of acculturation. These women are depicted as leading complex lives because they are not heedless and insensitive. They do not only think about their own accomplishment and happiness. They are also sensitive about family values and the cultural mores of their native country. They do not believe in either self-effacement or selfishness. They are after a balance that will keep their dual identities as South Asians and Americans. This, in fact, makes them walk a tightrope and transform them into spokespersons of a new brand of feminism. Postcolonial/postmodern feminist thought is helpful in clarifying the struggle of the lively female characters portrayed by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri in their fictional works.

Chapter Four initially discusses the life and works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni before moving on to a postcolonial feminist reading of some stories from her short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995). Then the theoretical perspective changes to analyze how Divakaruni's female characters reflect postmodern feminist aspects. Finally, the chapter closes with a study of the diasporic elements in the characters that make them fluid. The basic argument in this section relies upon the fact that the diasporic women depicted in the texts lead lives that are always in a flux.

(i) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni −A Brief Introduction:

The woman characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage* struggle to bridge the gap between the East and the West. Though they shuttle between

these two worlds, they manage to create an identity for themselves that is capable of containing both new world independence and traditional values inside familial space. Much of the struggle that Divakaruni's female characters encounter is a reflection of the author's own attempts at reconciling her past and present. For example, Meera of *A Perfect Life* tries to balance her roles as an efficient worker in the workplace and a good mother at home. Korobi Roy, the protagonist of Divakaruni's latest novel *Oleander Girl,* is a girl who undertakes a lonely voyage to America in search of her father. Gathering new experiences at every step of this journey and defying innumerable odds, she becomes successful in her quest. Nevertheless, conquering the allure of an independent, attractive life in the U.S., she chooses to come back to the life of commitment and dutifulness in India. In an interview with Metka Zupancic, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni points out two cross −currents of her character thus:

> I grew up with very definite notions of womanhood, of who is considered a good woman and how she is to behave, especially within the family context. Much of that was based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices. As a result of immigration, when we find ourselves in the West, there is quite a different notion of what a good woman is and what she is expected to do. (Divakaruni)

The travails of regulating such contradictory ideas of womanhood are a recurrent theme in Divakaruni's works, which she depicts through characters who face diverse situations in dissimilar spaces. This contradiction is innate; it emanates from their very distinctive upbringing. As Divakaruni has admitted on more than one occasion, her childhood days in India, especially the time she spent with her grandfather, had an everlasting effect on her writing. The beliefs she acquired from her homeland also has had similar effects on the characters she creates in her fiction. The experience of coping with the changed diasporic space and the subsequent mutations in the diasporic subjects are two major themes in Divakaruni's prose.

Divakaruni is one of the notable diasporic writers of the post− *Midnight's Children* phase of Indian writing in English. A versatile writer, she has authored a number of poetry collections, novels, children's books, and periodical publications. Apart from being a writer, she is a social worker who works for women in distress. She is involved in volunteer work for many non-profit humanitarian organizations. Divakaruni has been on the board of Pratham (a worldwide

nonprofit organization that is dedicated to removing illiteracy in India), Houston for a number of years. Divakaruni also serves on the advisory board of Daya, a Houston-based nonprofit organization that works to prevent violence against women and strives to strengthen and promote healthy family relationships within the South Asian community. Her own family is closely involved with the Indo-American Charity Foundation (a non-profit charitable organization that helps the underprivileged and needy with monetary help as well as volunteer work); Murthi Divakaruni (Chitra's husband) is its current President. Saheli is a nonprofit organization based in Austin, Texas, that provides assistance to Asian and other immigrant families dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking. Divakaruni knows the founders and board of Saheli closely and has helped in its fundraising efforts. Lastly, but as importantly, in 1991 she became founder-member and president of Maitri, a free, confidential, referral non-profit organization based in the San Francisco Bay Area that primarily helps families from South Asia facing domestic violence, emotional abuse, cultural alienation, and human trafficking.

The active involvement of Divakaruni with battered women has had an intense effect on her writing. The themes of domestic violence, emotional abuse, abortion etc. have repeatedly found their ways into her novels and short stories. Interestingly, working with women in distress also inspires her to write about the strong bonding that can develop between women and also about their resilience. In an interview with Soumi Basu, she says, "women often support each other through the problems that rise out of a patriarchal structure." In the same interview, she confesses that: "I'm sure the work I do with battered women, through organizations like Maitri and Daya have influenced my need to present in my work strong women who overcome tragedies" (n.pag). For this reason, in a story like "The Bats" from *Arranged Marriage,* she depicts how a woman can suffer as a victim of domestic violence. In another story called "The Ultrasound", published in this book, she portrays the bonding between two sisters as a way out from the kind of predicament that can be caused by patriarchal abuse of power. The same theme resonates in novels such as *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*.

Divakaruni was born in 1957 in Kolkata, India. She attended a convent school in India run by Irish nuns. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Calcutta. In 1976, at the age of 19, Divakaruni immigrated to the United States. She continued her education in the United States by earning a master's degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. At the beginning of her

professional career, she lived with her husband and two children and taught creative writing at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, CA. She now lives and teaches in Texas, where she is a professor at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. Her first works were the books of poetry, *Dark like the River* (1987), *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), and *Black Candle* (1991). In 1995, Divakaruni published *Arranged Marriage*, a collection of short stories. In 1997, Divakaruni wrote her first novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997). Her major novels also include *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *Palace of Illusions* (2008), *One Amazing Thing* (2010), and *Oleander Girl* (2012). She has also authored a young adult fantasy series called *The Brotherhood of the Conch.* The second book of the series, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* came out in 2005 and the third and final book of the series, *Shadowland*, was published in 2009. She is also a prolific writer of periodical publications; her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*.

The first nineteen years of her life Divakaruni lived in India were spent in a modest middle-class environment in the household of Rajendra Kumar Banerjee, her father, and an accountant in an oil company, and Tatini Banerjee, her mother who was a kindergarten and elementary school teacher. After moving to the United States, through a friend she met Murthi Divakaruni, an engineer through a friend. This resulted in their marriage in 1979. Her two sons, Anand and Abhay, were born in 1991 and 1994. The near-death experience she had during the birth of her second son is particularly important for her work because this experience inspired the magic realism of her first novel *The Mistress of Spices*. While talking to Morton Marcus about this event Divakaruni gave a detailed account of the emotions that led to the writing *The Mistress of Spices*. She says:

> "I was in the hospital for a month and only half-conscious most of the time. I had the sense that I was hovering between life and death. It was a strange sensation--not frightening but dreamlike, and I felt at that point that we could move back and forth between these two states, and that this is something we don't comprehend when we're living our daily lives; that, really, we are always moving between life and death and new

> life. I think that experience gave birth to the main character of the book, Tilo, the mistress of spices, who moves back and forth between one existence and another." (Divakaruni)

Likewise, many events of her personal life often triggered her writing. For example, in her early thirties when she was teaching at Foothill College in the Bay Area, her students often asked her questions about India. To her dismay, Divakaruni discovered that the memories of her birthplace were failing her. At that time, her grandfather, with whom she had a close tie during childhood, passed away. The inability to join the funeral sparked in Divakaruni an intense desire of connecting not only with her grandfather, "but also to remember India and to explore what it means to be an immigrant woman living in the United States" (Milstead 592). Responding to her inner feelings, she joined the Berkley Poet's Workshop and submitted poems to journals. In 1986, her first published poem "At Muktinath" appeared in Calyx.

Divakaruni's teaching career has also influenced her writing. In an interview with Dharini Rasiah, she says: "I love teaching. It's a very important part of my life. Foothill, being a community college, has an open door policy, which I really believe in.[…] It goes along with what I believe for my own writing, which is that writing or books should be accessible to everybody" (Rasiah 152). Divakaruni thus bridges her teaching profession and creative writing by keeping both of them open to everyone. Her work at Houston university as professor of Creative Writing gives her ample opportunity to work with young writers. Commenting on the coming together of her teaching and writing, she notes:

> For me writing and teaching really dovetail nicely together. When I teach, I'm forced to think more about writing and what effective writing is and it also gives me a real incentive to keep up with my reading. It helps me to keep balanced and also I find it very inspiring to work with young writers and to realize that we're all in this together, that we're trying to master a craft that's so immense and complex. As I teach I am always aware of how much I have to learn. (Divakaruni)

After writing poetry for the first few years of her literary career Divakaruni, noticed that by 1992 "poems were becoming more narrative than poetic and enrolled in a course on writing fiction." (Milstead 592). Her first short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995) won an American Book Award. It also bagged the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award and the PEN Josephine Miles Award for fiction. One of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's gifts as a storyteller is the lyrical quality of her prose and she has been praised for the "skilled use of lyrical descriptions" in her fictions (Davis 70).

Before beginning the discussion on *Arranged Marriage* it is important to note that most stories of this collection, though not fully autobiographical, are influenced by Divakaruni's thoughts and dispositions as a South Asian diasporic woman writer. The main characters of the stories often voice the author's own beliefs. Through their transformation, they mirror Divakaruni's own experiences of adaptation and change. As C. N. Eswari observes: "for an immigrant writer, the act of writing itself becomes a form of purgation, an outward projection of the inner chaos and the autobiographical mode, becomes the most suited vehicle for expressing the angst experienced during the process of becoming a foreign citizen" (218). The writing of an immigrant author is, in other words, often soaked in autobiographical elements, without being directly autobiographical. Divakaruni is no exception, especially in *Arranged Marriage*, her debut short story collection. Critics sometimes categorize Divakaruni as a first-generation immigrant writer writing about immigrants. Begona Simal thinks that most of Divakaruni's stories and novels "deal with the experience of migration, the first cultural clashes the immigrants face in America, the nostalgia for the old country, etc" (168). The female characters of *Arranged Marriage* show all these traits and in what follows therefore character analysis will merge with conversions Divakaruni herself experienced as a South Asian diasporic writer.

Arranged Marriage, Divakaruni's first short story collection, published in 1995, is a collection of eleven thematically connected stories that received enthusiastic acclaim and won her the American Book Award. The book has been appreciated by *San Francisco Chronicle* as a collection of "exquisite stories" that entice us with the author's gift of storytelling and her characters' originality, independence and insight. However, a few critics castigated Divakaruni for stereotyping her characters in it to meet western expectations. Of these critics, Samrat Upadhyay is one who holds that in this book the writer is too eager to exoticize characters

instead of exploring the complexities of their mind. In opposition, Dharini Rasiah contends that Divakaruni "reworks questions that assume a polarized East/West cultural conflict that all South Asian Americans/immigrants uniformly encounter…" (141). Rasiah further comments that Divakaruni also construes a more "complicated reality that recalls histories of colonialism, geographic distribution, and racism, and she often draws parallels to the experiences of other ethnic and racial groups" (ibid). *Arranged Marriage* also received negative reviews for its portrayal of, in one critic's words, "exoticized fantasies of Westerners" and "stereotyping of polarized concept of freedom for a woman in America versus loss of freedom for a woman in India" (Huang 70).

Notwithstanding these almost diametrically opposed reviews of *Arranged Marriage*, critics from all quarters agree that the recurrent themes of the stories of the collection involve women, identity, diasporic consciousness, ethnicity, racial issues and the generation gap in immigrant lives. Divakaruni explores these themes in her stories with subtlety and sensitivity, mostly to trace the development of the female characters. The stories of *Arranged Marriage* unfold around female protagonists perennially struggling to balance identities in diasporic space. This is why their transformation is analyzed in this chapter along with postcolonial and postmodern feminisms against the backdrop of the South Asian diaspora. The aim is to determine how after undergoing the process of adaptation and acculturation, the women characters of these stories reveal themselves as having an altered, new, and mutated identity.

Most stories of *Arranged Marriage* reveal that creating a meaningful existence in the United States can be a debilitating experience for new comers. The world they had left behind, of course, was not perfect. However, the diasporic land of the new domicile is also not a land of endless promises. In both places, the diasporic subject, specifically the female subject, faces challenges in finding a suitable space for her that neither dominates nor diminishes her personality. The diasporic woman finds herself in a void in the new land, where the oppressive mores of the native land are replaced by racism and alienation. The female diasporic subject, therefore, has to struggle against great odds with optimism and determination, which often results in the formation of a new identity capable of negotiating with diasporic travails, thereby surviving life-changing experiences successfully. In explaining how Divakaruni explains this triumph of her female characters, Anne M. Dickson observes that, [b]y depicting cultural customs that at once constrain and venerate, abuses that initially victimize but ultimately

empower, and relationships that both deplete and fulfill women, …" Divakaruni portrays the development of her characters skillfully (95). When the women characters of *Arranged* Marriage "leave India with the intention of living fuller and freer lives, away from the traditional restricted routines of their mothers and grandmothers" comments Rocio G. Davis, they only find themselves "unsure of how to proceed and what to believe in a situation that is more insidious than the one they escaped from" (68). Tutun Mukherjee quotes Sandra Ponzanesi in "Immigrant Desires: Narratives of the Indian Diaspora by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" where Ponzanesi opines that "[p]laying out between centre and periphery, literatures of the diaspora highlight many of the conflicts and paradoxes that characterize our "global village", proclaiming affiliation with the global while asserting their representation of the local" (qtd. in Mukherjee 186). This dual negotiation with the global and the local makes Divakaruni's characters complex and well−rounded. Mukherjee notes the role of women writers in making the female characters remarkable by making them represent the "interiority of female/gendered subjectivity" of the immigrant experience (187). Thus, through the portrayal of the female characters the writers "acquired for themselves, an increased visibility of those migrants from the Indian subcontinent [who are] now being referred to as the 'newest Americans'" (Mukherjee 187).

Imposing national heritage and cultural mores on women in the name of upholding tradition is an age-old practice in the South Asian context. In order to create an imaginary home, diasporic people attempt to reconnect with their native culture, by refashioning ideas of nationhood and borders. In this regard, the normative cultural practices that are used as referential points are often taken from patriarchal traditions that define "the codes and conventions of femininity and womanhood" (Bhatia 512). Making women bear their heritage and culture leaves a lasting imprint on their identity formation so that in diasporic space they have to struggle hard and contend with strong backward pulls exerted due to the native community's attempt to retain cultural identity, while trying to acculturate with the host country. Even outside diasporic space, in their familiar society, women have a difficult time trying to exercise any type of freedom within their predetermined roles as wives. The next part of this chapter scrutinizes some characters facing identity crisis while being caught between tradition and modernity.

(ii) Mirroring of Postcolonial Feminism in *Arranged Marriage*:

"The Bats" is the first story of *Arranged Marriage*. Though it is not diasporic in its setting, it shows how South Asian women feel about family as well as social values. The story is also important for its portrayal of two generations−a mother and her daughter. The difference between the dispositions of the mother and her daughter depicted in "The Bats" also exists in the other stories of *Arranged Marriage*. To run away from her abusive husband, the little girl's mother in "The Bats" has to travel to different villages to live with relatives, after leaving her husband's house in the city. So, in a sense, the mother and daughter live diasporic lives that force them to undertake frequent journeys to unfamiliar places.

"The Bats" is a poignant tale of a tradition-bound, dependent, helpless Indian housewife's battle for survival. Narrated by her child daughter, the story focuses on the perpetuation of the suffering of the mother and daughter because of the custom-bound disposition of the mother. In this story the mother travels to her relatives' houses in different villages to escape from the violence inflicted on her by her husband, only to return in the hope of reconciliation with the abusive man. The daughter, despite being a child, can see the futility of the hope of her mother to have a normal, violence-free life with her father. However, in a kind of willful suspension of disbelief, the mother tends to believe that her husband, portrayed as a demonic figure by Divakaruni, is capable of reformation. It is her belief in the goodness of her husband that makes her come back continually to him after each violent encounter. Like the bats that keep coming back to the fruit orchard even after hundreds of them are poisoned to death every night, she goes back to her abusive husband despite being repeatedly abused by him.

The story skillfully manipulates the psychological working of the mother-daughter's minds to express the ambivalence of a patriarchal society that dictates the moral and social duties of women. As a representative of her tradition and culture, the mother, after failing to break from the social shackles, returns to her familiar role of a docile housewife. She admits to her daughter that she "couldn't stand it, the stares and whispers of the women, down in the marketplace. The loneliness of being without him" (Divakaruni 11-12). The confession illustrates the helplessness of the abused woman against the advances of patriarchal society, the society's norms being ironically perpetuated by women along with men. It also shows how women are conditioned to uphold the norms of patriarchy that expects women to carry on with traditional roles.

Whereas the mother in "The Bats" is socially conditioned, the daughter is a rebel who applies all her strength to thwart the mother's decision to go back to her abusive father. She is naturally adaptive as she, although born and brought up in the city, easily blends to their diasporic village life. Her power of adjustability and ability to see the truth of things indicate the difference between two generations. The daughter is open to change and thinks clearly about their own happiness, albeit it comes at the cost of living on the fringes of society.

"The Bats" is an appropriate beginning of the collection because of its portrayal of the contrasting mother-daughter image. It is as though the daughter symbolizes the pivotal characters of the other stories of *Arranged Marriage* who are self-conscious enough to struggle for their rights in their own ways. Whereas the mother in the story stands for tradition and culture, the daughter, with all her rebellious thoughts and disillusionment symbolizes change and self-consciousness.

In most stories of *Arranged Marriage*, we find similar contrasting pictures between mothers and daughters. However, in the other stories daughters are old enough to make their own decisions. Therefore, in some other stories, we come across daughters who take decisions about their lives independently of their mothers. Although the decisions are not always right, yet the daughters are willing to bear the consequences on their own.

The fourth story of the collection "The Word Love" also studies mother-daughter relationships to illustrate the vast discrepancy existing between these two generations. Here the daughter occupies the diasporic space as a foreign student in America whereas the mother continues to cling to her unchanging ideals of integrity in India. The most striking feature of the story is the transformation of the daughter etched by Divakaruni against the unchanging picture of the mother figure. The mother is a stern single parent whose admonitions keep haunting the daughter who breaks a number of laws set for her by her mother from the time she was a child. Time does not bring any change in the mother's world whereas the daughter embraces new experiences as she moves on in life.

The mother in this story is an example of a custom-bound Indian widow who attempts to conform to the ideal image of a widowed mother of a girl child obsessively. The extremely coded behavior of the mother reaffirms the expected disposition of the widow in patriarchal

society. In an essay on the story postcolonial critic Nandi Bhatia refers to Nira Yuval-Davis while elaborating the idea of social codes becoming normative. According to Yuval-Davis, patriarchal values and social codes are not limited to style, dress, and beaviour; rather, they extend to "more elaborate codes of customs, literary and artistic modes of production…and the language" (qtd. in Bhatia 515). The customs the mother practices and transmits to her daughter exemplifies the societal dictates of a section of the postcolonial nation that clings to its past. Bhatia believes that cultural identity, when fashioned by society, "prescribes fixed roles for women and becomes regressive as it seeks to contain them in progressive socio-cultural traditions" (515). The mother in this story adheres unswervingly to this fixed role, failing completely to understand her daughter's needs.

Divided between the mother's world of tradition and American life, the daughter decides to move on with her life, albeit with some remorse. In other words, the moving on does not imply a complete rejection of the old life. The daughter tries to connect with her mother in every possible way even though she lives with an American in his place. The first thing she does while moving to Rex's apartment is to put up the batik hanging that she received as a gift from her mother, as a "talisman" (Divakaruni 61). Her life with Rex is fraught with guilt as she continually thinks of this is a kind of betrayal of her mother. After she fails a number of times to tell the mother about her secret, she grows desperate. Ultimately, the secret is revealed. The mother, of course, is totally noncommittal and unable to accept the daughter's choice. She cuts her off from her life by completely withdrawing herself, even by going to the extent of changing the phone line and returning the registered letter sent by her daughter. The daughter's inability in coping with the rejection results in poor performance in class and ultimately impels her to break up with Rex. She clings to the horrible image her mother had painted about an unfaithful daughter who had committed suicide for repentance. She is so overwhelmed by the image that despite all her modern thinking and lifestyle she too, thinks of committing suicide.

The diasporic turn in the daughter's character makes her bounce back to life and adopt a fresh outlook. Like an independent traveler, she rejects her past life with her family as well as Rex. Cutting off her roots, however, leaves her feeling hollow, albeit in a positive sense. It washes her clean like the rain and makes her feel ready to begin a new life. She is now going to live for herself; not a duty-bound life any more, but a light, careless one. Thus the emergence of

this new woman reflects a person's growth and the making and remaking of the self. The moment the daughter realizes the meaning of her life anew is a moment of epiphany. Robert Ross gives a very substantial account of this moment in his essay ""Dissolving Boundaries" The Woman as Immigrant in the Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni." Ross notes that Divakaruni's narrative explores: "the condition of Indian women adrift in a society where the past social rigidity no longer applies but has left a void in the present" (250). The realization of the possibility of a new beginning, according to Ross, happens when "the pivotal female character has experienced a moment of awareness, an epiphany, that will certainly mitigate the pain that the future holds" (ibid).

Another story of *Arranged Marriage* "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs" chronicles the shock of negotiation with foreign culture faced by a young Indian girl called Jayanti Ganguli. The story line of this story is more complicated and tense than that of "The Word Love" because of its frequent references to racial hatred. Jayanti is disillusioned at the shabby condition of her uncle's apartment because it does not match her vision of America. The apartment poses a stark contrast to the images she had gathered from reading *Good House Keeping* and *Sunset* at the USIS library back home.

At one point of the story, the protagonist faces a racial attack in her new American neighborhood that shakes her to the core. The encounter with racial rant is an unsettling experience for Jayanti as she cannot see herself as a "nigger". The incident occurs when she, confined as she is to the small apartment for a few days in cold weather, feels depressed and persuades her aunt to go outside for a walk. Though aunt Pratima cautions her that the place is not safe, Jayanti does not believe her and insists on going out. As they reach a poorer part of the neighbourhood, they meet four urchins playing on the street. The boys call them "nigger" and hurl fistfuls of slush at them (Divakaruni 50). The word seems so remote to Jayanti that she at once associates it with the colonial past of India, thinking of it as: "…an impossible word which belongs to another place and time. In the mouth of a red-faced gin-and-tonic drinking British official, perhaps, in his colonial bungalow, …" (Divakaruni 51). Clearly, this word does not belong to her vision of America, which is a country of dream and hope, and of freedom. Her inability of identifying herself with the word jolts her as she vehemently thinks: "…can't they *see* that I'm not black at all but an Indian girl of good family?" (Divakaruni 51).

Jayanti's words are very intriguing as they contain layers of meaning connected to her postcolonial past. In India, the white colonists made skin colour a tool of subordination. Satoshi Mizutani (2011) observes that the status of the ruling caste of the Britons in India was justified by their whiteness. White supremacy had left an indelible mark in the mindscape of postcolonial subjects like Jayanti. All over the world, colonial powers make use of their culture and language to dominate the colonized in both repressive and ideological ways. Though the United States is a postcolonial country, some people there continue with racist practices associated with colonizing policies and principles. Racism is a reality in an America that views its nonwhite immigrants as inferior. Such a perspective results in a somewhat isolated existence for them. Husne Jahan voices this isolated state by noting how nonwhite immigrants struggle to adapt to the "pre-existing cultural norms" of the U.S. (78). She illustrates her point by saying that it has been easier for white immigrants with linguistic differences to "merge into a melting pot" through "linguistic assimilation" (ibid). However, this has not been the case for immigrants "with linguistic and racial differences" as they find themselves "twice removed from the normative standards of the country" (ibid).

Jayanti finds herself in such a twice-removed position in a country that had been a dreamland for her. The unexpected racial attack she faces leaves her bewildered. She immediately connects it to her colonized past and the history of slavery in America. However, her words reveal the subconscious working of her mind that moulds itself in the fashion of colonial supremacy. It is interesting to see how she emphasizes the fact that she is not "black" and comes from a "good family." Postcolonialism has left such a lasting ideological imprint of racism and class distinctions on its subjects that Jayanti, a postcolonial subject, unconsciously assumes a superior counter-position based on her skin color and class position when faced with white racism.

"The Maid Servant's Story" also revolves around the theme of class distinctions and other tools of colonial rule such as exploitation and oppression. Patriarchal values dominate the narrative because of its portrayal of the husband/father figure as all-powerful in the custom bound space of the household. Generational gap and mother-daughter relationships are also important here as in some other writings of Divakaruni. The story contains postcolonial feminist elements. It also deals with tension in mother-daughter relationships. This story is studied here to

find out how it conforms to postcolonial feminist theory in its depiction of an Indian mother and her diasporic daughter.

Manisha is the first narrator of the story whose role changes into that of a listener as the narration shifts from her to her aunt Deepa Mashi. The meta-narrative mode of the story creates room for Manisha's growth as a narrator as she is able to reflect on her mother's behavior and her own love life in America with newly gathered hindsight from the aunt, when the aunt finishes her story.

The story unfolds the childhood of Manisha, whose mother was a symbol of traditional Indian femininity with her beauty and grace, and display of responsibility towards her family. Though she exercises a limited sovereignty inside the house, her main role is to extend loving care to the smooth running of family affairs. She is someone conforming to the age-old patriarchal customs of the aristocratic, traditional Indian family. The contrasting picture of her husband reveals a domineering man with very clear notions of propriety as per the respectable traditions of his family's heritage.

The wife/mother in the story is an embodiment of the spiritual/material divide that has been created by the Indian nationalist movement when it confronted colonialism. According to Partha Chatterjee, culture was split into spiritual/material streams to attain two different goals under colonial rule in India. It was necessary for Indian culture to adopt the "superior techniques" of Europe to organize material life, but it was also essential to preserve the distinct self-identity of national culture that symbolizes the difference between the east and the west (Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India" 623). Chatterjee observes that the spiritual/material distinction implies a deeper ideological dichotomy between the inner and the outer.

"Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world," notes Chatterjee in his trenchant analysis of colonialism and Indian nationalism ("Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India" 624). Whereas the outer space is considered as the domain of the material, the inner space of home "represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity" (ibid). Indian nationalist ideology views the outer world as a treacherous terrain whose profanity must not denigrate the sanctity of the inner space, the home. Whereas the outer world is

the domain of man, the home, and women as its representative, must remain unaffected by the former's profane activities. Such activities include dressing like the English, eating like them, and also consuming nicotine or alcohol. These activities are considered 'profane' because they go against the sanctity of Hindu religion.

The mother/wife in "The Maid Servant's Story" exemplifies the pattern mentioned in above about women as representatives of the inner space of the home. It is interesting to note that she is always referred to as "the wife" in the story. Her name remains unknown forever. Her wifely identity engulfs her individual self. Nevertheless, she does not completely conform to this pattern of effacement of identity. By giving Sarala (the maid) shelter in the house, the wife rebels against patriarchal domestic structure. She also educates her and gives her expensive gifts, from her pre-marital collection of saris. Although her triumph is temporary, since the husband gets rid of Sarala while the wife is at the Hospital, the wife retains her rebellious spirit throughout the whole narration, as is evident in her relationship with her daughter Manisha.

The traits of tradition and modernity co-existent in the mother culminate in the daughter who, after going to America for higher studies, falls in love with an Indian man and starts living with him outside marriage. The difference between the two generations signifies the conformity of the mother with a tradition that conditions her to remain in a conjugal relationship notwithstanding husband's infidelity. Even after anticipating her husband's failed advances towards the maid Sarala and her consequent ousting from the house, the wife continues her marital life, thinking about custom and tradition that will not accept "the scandal of a broken home…" (Divakaruni156). If she leaves her husband's house, her baby boy will be helpless and her daughter will lose all chances of a good marriage. It is ironical that the daughter, after going to the United States, gets involved in a relationship that goes against traditional Indian customs, and ridicules her mother's apprehension of her daughter not having chances of a good marriage. Manisha and her boyfriend Bijoy's relationship is "[a] liberated relationship, no strings attached" (Divakaruni 114).

No matter how liberated Manisha thinks herself to be, after listening to her mother's story, she becomes doubtful about her decision about living with Bijoy. All these years she had fashioned her life to make it completely different from her mother. She now feels, however, that her carefully patterned life "… is only a repetition, in a different *raga*, of her tragic song"

(Divakaruni 167). Manisha's quest for happiness in the company of a man in a relationship that works on the man's terms, brings out the tradition-bound traits in her character. However, it is also true that she does not completely conform to tradition. The process of transformation that had started with her mother becomes more discernible in Manisha. The pull towards tradition that they experience is also more individualistic and less intense in the daughter because unlike her mother she does not want to comply with society, but becomes aware of the common fate of most women belonging to her society. This collective, as well as individualistic awareness, makes Manisha more enlightened than her mother, who is unable to recognize the patterns of deception in which many women's lives are trapped. Whether or not Manisha would be able to break the circle and leave Bijoy, the fact that she cares little for the institution of marriage indicates how much she has progressed towards a destination different than that of her mother's.

The ninth story in the collection "The Ultrasound" offers a complicated version of female psyche as it portrays parallel pictures of two cousins in two geographical locations. One of them, Arundhati, lives in Burdwan, a provincial Indian town, and the other, Anjali, in California, USA. Narrated from the view point of Anjali, the story, cross-cutting between the present and past, chronicles the development of two women from childhood into maturity. The plot revolves around the cousins' growing up in the same house, parting because of marriage, and almost simultaneous pregnancies. As the title suggests, the climax occurs when their amniocentesis tests' results reveal that Arundhati's child is going to be a girl. Her in-laws insist that she abort the child, as "it's not fitting that the eldest child of the Bhattacharjee household should be a female" (Divakaruni 224). The story ends with Anjali contemplating about helping Arundhati to migrate to the U.S. with her daughter to give them a self-reliant life.

At the outset, the story seems to put forward a simple contrast between India and America, the latter being a land of freedom and possibilities, whereas the former seems to be a place of obsolete and repressive customs. Indeed, the narration repeatedly refers to India as a place where patriarchal practices reign supreme. However, a closer reading makes clear that the naïve narrator Anju (Anjali) is unable to see her own subordination to patriarchal machinations even though she is residing in the U.S., the champion country of women's emancipation, according to her.

Anju's inability to see her own subordinate position is an example of her conditioning under an age-old patriarchal system that has taken on a normalized form due to tradition. This phenomenon is not only true of India, but also of other postcolonial nations, and even for the U.S., and all other places where nationalistic discourses deal with the question of women on unequal terms. Commenting on this issue M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty opine that since states are "instrumental in the reconfiguring of global relationships" by facilitating the transnational movement of capital within national borders, capitalism and some processes of "recolonization" give the states power to "grapple with colonial legacies" (xxiii). Alexander and Mohanty believe that both "postcolonial and advanced capitalist/colonial states" practice "intervention, control, discipline, and surveillance" on females within the states (ibid).The critics emphasize the point that the situation is particularly true for feminism in the Third World. Anju, in spite of living in California, is often subjected to patriarchal oppression; in this sense, her fate is not too different from her Burdwan cousin Runu.

The reader of "The Ultrasound" realizes the confinement of Anju within the boundaries set by her husband Sunil who, despite being liberal in some ways, exercises dominance over his emotionally and financially dependent wife. The nonlinear narration of the story, however, does not always depict a naïve Anju. She at times protests Sunil's nonchalant ways. At the end of the story she resolves to go to any extent to bring Runu to her city. On the other hand, Runu also shows resilience by leaving her husband and in-laws' house in order to keep her baby alive.

Of all the stories of *Arranged Marriage*, the story of Anju and Runu seems to clearly uphold the "Manichean polarity of colonial discourse" for which Husne Jahan had castigated Divakaruni in her essay "Colonial Woes in Postcolonial Writing: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*" (Jahan 80). Jahan suggests that the Manichean polarity of colonial discourse endows "the colonizer with positive qualities and the colonized with all its opposite negatives,…" (ibid). She believes that this whole process is materialized in Divakaruni's collection of short stories. Nevertheless, we have to note also that the narrator Anju, who is the agent of this "orientalizing" project in "The Ultrasound," proves to be an unreliable narrator somewhat unable to recognize that she herself is being oppressed. Divakaruni has expanded this story's plot in her sequential novels *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*. The second novel pictures an America that is very dissimilar from Anju's "mythical paradise" (Jahan 78). The

promises Anju made to Sudha (Runu of "The Ultrasound") before her coming to America prove to be unrealizable as Sudha struggles with her life in the new country. At the end of *The Vine of Desire* Sudha decides to leave America for India, as she does not find any fulfillment in migrant life. Life does not turn out for Anju the way she imagines it would. With her newfound wisdom, she attempts to forge a new identity in her diasporic life.

As in the other stories discussed so far, "Affair" construes the life of two Indian women, caught between the pulls of tradition and modernity. Kumkum Sangari believes that the ideas of tradition and modernity are "eminently colonial constructs" (17). She argues for the examination of how the social change has affected women and how far this change is "asserted or desired" (ibid). The change is asserted or desired because women actively and willingly undergo this transformation, in spite of the patriarchal attempts to keep them unchanged. Sangari argues that "Womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired, not an actual cultural continuity"(ibid). However, the actual cultural continuity exists, though it is "never either pure or uncontaminated" (Sangari 18). The point here is that society tends to believe that women do not change with time, and that there exists a stable cultural continuity beyond any notion of change. However, this belief of the society is not real because women have constantly been undergoing changes, although such changes may be subject to willful neglect because of long-standing patriarchal practices. Abha and Meena, two characters from "Affair", for instance, embody the kind of changes that are mostly unnoticed by the men in their lives.

Mentally abused by her over smart, sarcastic, and witty husband Ashok, Abha feels inferior to him. He is handsome, playboyish and always makes fun of his wife. Things get complicated when Abha assumes that a love affair is brewing between Ashok and Meena, her sleek and chic best friend. However, Abha discovers that Meena's real boyfriend is a middle−aged American. Nevertheless, by then Abha has become aware of the strains in her marriage with Ashok. She decides to leave him and live an independent life.

Abha had started her new life in the U.S. as a traditional Indian housewife, cooking Ashok's favourite food and always wearing Indian dresses. Her initial dependence on Ashok, more emotional than economic, is another sign of the way her native culture has conditioned her. However, one of the pervasive underlying themes of the story questions the role of sex in the life of someone such as the tradition-bound Abha and her rebellious friend Meena. Much is said in

the story about Abha and Ashok's sexual life that seems to be conditioned by patriarchal codes that control the wife's attitude towards sex, even in the case of matrimonial sex.

Abha considers sex to be "a matter between married people, carried out in the silent privacy of their bedroom…" (Divakaruni 234).This is why she does not approve of the American cable channel, which focuses on sexual pleasures, a focus that Abha considers sacrilegious to the sanctity of her home. In spite of knowing that Ashok interprets her attitude as a result of her "*prudish Indian upbringing*" she cannot help feeling the way she does (emphasis in original, Divakaruni 234). Jyoti Puri sums up this conditioning of women in postcolonial Indian society by observing that, "the importance placed on managing external threats to our bodies and sexualities, as well as on containing our sexual impulses, remained consistent across the spectrum"(x). Puri explains perfectly Abha's disposition in the introduction to her book *Woman, Body, Desire in Post-Colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality*:

> Our femininity and sexual respectability were not negotiable and were linked to a national cultural tradition centering the pitfalls of modernity and westernization. Our bodies, sexualities, and gender identities were not immune to the influence of the complex, uneven configurations of modernity and national cultural tradition. (x)

Though brought up in the same social ambience as Abha, Meena seems a lot more permissive in her outfits and physical gestures. Her uninhibited ways of dancing with Ashok at a party reveal her indifference to tradition. Even the fact of having an extra-marital affair with an American testifies to Meena's difference from Abha; at the same time, it proves the impossibility of a monolithic depiction of South Asian women in the diaspora in writers like Divakaruni.

In this section, the last text to be analyzed within the theoretical frame of postcolonial feminism is "Meeting Mrinal", the concluding story of *Arranged Marriage*. How the female characters of Divakaruni's short stories reflect postmodern feminism in their identity formation will be considered in the next section. It should be mentioned here that the same character could be subjected to multiple analyses since Divakaruni's woman characters contain myriad strands of elements in their personality that help shape their identities.

Offering contrasting pictures of two women, a recurrent strategy in Divakaruni, is once again deployed in "Meeting Mrinal", where two childhood friends ponder over the futility of their lives from two opposed viewpoints. Asha, the narrator in the story, has always been an admirer of the smartness of her friend Mrinalini. Even after their parting years ago, they have corresponded regularly. Almost twenty years after their parting at Kolkata, Mrinal comes to San Francisco to attend a conference. When she calls Asha to fix a meeting with her, the latter feels hesitant, as she does not want to disclose to her friend the fact of her recent divorce. Asha remembers Mrinal's skeptical attitude towards Asha's decision of accepting an arranged marriage even before finishing college. After so many years, Asha feels that perhaps Mrinal has always been right about "women being financially independent" before tying themselves down to the institution of marriage (Divakaruni 280).

On the other hand, the fashionable, beautiful, smart, and professionally successful Mrinal is unhappy about the void in her personal life, and a situation where she does not have a soul to share her loneliness. Ironically, she tells Asha about what a wonderful life she has with her husband and son. Asha does not divulge that Mahesh has left her to seek happiness with his red-haired ex-secretary Jessica and is having difficulty connecting with her teenage son Dinesh. She carries on with the false picture of her happy married life before Mrinal to prove that she made the right choice years ago in marrying Mahesh without getting self-reliant in the first place.

An important aspect of Asha's character is that she holds herself responsible for the divorce. She tries to compensate for it by keeping the expensive house for Dinesh's sake, the rent of which was paid by her husband before the divorce. Now it is difficult for her to maintain it. However, this way, she feels, "I will have made up to him partly for my failure to hold on to his father" (Divakaruni 277). She tried hard to make her marriage work in every possible way. "I'd fought the divorce every way I knew−reasoned, pleaded, tried the silent treatment, cooked Mahesh's favorite meals" (Divakaruni 289). Asha's words reflect her conditioning in a tradition that has evoked a very specific idea of the role of a woman. Any deviation from that role is considered as a failure on her part. Sunaina Maira reaffirms this conditioning by observing: "South Asian American women, as the repositories of tradition, are often cast as "cultural carriers" responsible for the ideologically laden production of tradition, authenticity, and cultural value—a system that implicates them in reproducing these norms:" (qtd in Bhalla 133-134).

What Maira has indicated here can be aptly applied to Asha as she blames herself for not succeeding in reproducing the norms set by her native culture. Her remorse at failing to perform her given role results in the faking of a happy family setting before her childhood friend Mrinal, and concealing the fact that her divorce has taken place eleven months ago. Shamita Das Dasgupta and Sujata Warrier see this sort of attitude as the result of the perpetual pressure that their families put on South Asian women. Dasgupta and Warrier hold that "[t]heir families had placed a great deal of importance on marriage, motherhood, and religion. This led many of the women into believing that acceptable female roles included only those centered on being a "devoted daughter, nurturing wife, and sacrificing mother" ("The Footsteps of "Arundhati": Asian Indian Women's Experience of Domestic Violence in the United States" 246).

The previous paragraphs collate how some postcolonial feminist imbrications have been calibrated into the characters of Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage*. In the current section, the dominant argument is built on the premise that Indian women's crossing over of geographical boundaries does not always imply their cultural confluence. In most cases, they retain the residual effects of their traditional past, the fabricating of their identities largely depends on this retention. What makes their identities skewed is the convergence of modernity and tradition, a permutation that makes these characters susceptible to inconsistency. This inconsistency gives their identities pluralistic traits akin to the postmodern multiplicity of self. Therefore, the next section focuses on the postmodern feminist elements reflected in the woman characters of *Arranged Marriage*.

(iii) Divakaruni's Characters Reflecting Postmodern Feministic Aspects:

The previous section studied postcolonial imbrications in some woman characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage*. This section of Chapter Four analyzes how the same characters uphold character traits that have postmodern feministic identity markers in them. As discussed in Chapter Two, postmodern feminism emphasizes plurality and diversity while dealing with feminist issues. It also voices its concern about monolithic representation of identity. It believes in performativity of identity that does not remain fixed, but tends to become fluid and mutable. Simon de Beauvoir's question "Are there 'women'?" has led feminists to ask a host of questions such as if there is an essential nature or experience common to all women or if the category 'woman' is a social construct (qtd. in Brujin 2). On the question about the subjectivity of women articulated by Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva

builds her argument of "subject-in-process" (qtd. in Brujin 13). For Kristeva, the subject 'I' is changeable and also capable of bringing about change. This changeable subject 'I' is placed in opposition to a static subject position that is unchangeable.

In her essay "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva points out two phases of feminist movement and the differences in their approaches. The first phase, notes Kristeva, was concerned with the political demands of women. The demands included issues such as the struggle for equal pay for equal work, and for claiming power in social institutions to be on an equal footing with men. Feminists involved in this first phase of the movement tend to see women from a universal viewpoint where women can be considered as a group having similar problems and demands. The second phase of the feminist movement, believes Kristeva, is more aligned to the aesthetic or psychoanalytic experiences of women, as opposed to their political demands. Since this phase is more concerned with individual woman's experience, it seeks recognition of "an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non identical…" (Kristeva19).

Although Kristeva observes that female identity is fluid and changeable, in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) Judith Butler indicates the contradiction inherent in the Kristevan position by pointing out that Kristeva describes the maternal body as embodying a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. Butler argues that if something is determined prior to culture, then it cannot be performative and has to be essential or innate. Therefore, although Kristeva's notion of "subject-in-process" can be compared with Judith Butler's theory of "performative acts and gender constitution", these two thinkers differ in some points radically. For the present discussion, Butler's argument of performativity of gender is more appropriate as the female characters studied here change their roles according to the demands of their lives' changing situations.

At this point, it is imperative to analyze whether Butler's theory of performativity of gender considers the changing of roles of women in society as a matter of conscious choice or as something imposed upon them by existing cultural norms. In her essay "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex" Butler argues that "[b]ecoming a gender is an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions" (40). That is, performing one's gender role is a combined process of both conscious and

unconscious choices. Cultural history has already set sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions for certain gender roles. Whenever one chooses to act in a certain gender role, she has to do so according to received gender norms. The female characters studied in the next part of this chapter changes their roles according to their changed life circumstances. They act as wives, mothers, or rebels. However, their changed roles follow already existing cultural patterns of society.

In her insightful essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Judith Butler, with reference to Simone de Beauvoir, argues that the acts by which gender is constituted can be compared to performative acts within theatrical contexts. Beauvoir's (1949) famous proposition "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman," inspires Butler to argue that gender is not a stable identity or "locus of agency from which various acts proceeds;…" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" 519). Butler explicates Beauvoir's proposition as a reinterpretation of the doctrine that phenomenological tradition constitutes acts. So in this sense actions do not stem from a fixed identity; rather, identity is formed through a stylized repetition of acts. Butler's observation that gender is an enactment of internally discontinuous actions for "the mundane social audience" leads to her next argument that gendered identity is constructed (520). Since gendered identity is a performative accomplishment, it is "capable of being constituted differently" (ibid).

Butler's argument that identity is changeable and unfixed, works as the core idea of this section in analyzing Divakaruni's characters through the lens of postmodern feminism. Moreover, some other critics' perspectives on postmodern feminism are also applied in it according to their appropriateness in the analysis of some characters. For example, Christine Sylvester (1994) has been cited for her summation that postmodernism feminists are skeptical about assigned identities. As a result of this skepticism, they resort to an understanding of differences among women as well as points of convergences. Linell Cady's (1997) observation that modern notions of unified selfhood are reversed in postmodern notion of the dispersal of the self is also utilized to strengthen the argument that postmodern identity is ambivalent and unfixed.

The concept of shifting roles is one major theme of the story "Clothes" which depicts a newly married Indian Bengali woman who embarks on her first flight to join her husband in California. Married only for a few days to Somesh, who was not known to Sumita until the day he came to her father's house for bride-viewing, Sumita had little idea of the life awaiting her in the United States. Although Somesh is loving and caring, he does not earn enough for the couple to live decently. Sumita feels suffocated in a two-room apartment where she starts her conjugal life along with Somesh's parents. Wearing a sari, she serves tea to her mother-in-law's friends like "a good Indian wife" who never addresses her "husband by his name" (Divakaruni 25-26).The small apartment presses heavily on her privacy and she eagerly waits to move out to a larger, more accommodating place.

As the title of the story suggests, it is through clothes that Divakaruni traces the changing contours of Sumita's heart. From the very beginning of her American life, she has been dreaming of working in her husband's shop. She wants to go to college and pictures herself working in an American school or at Somesh's store wearing a cream blouse with a long brown skirt. The westernized clothes now symbolize her idea of emancipation, although saris had given her confidence and comfort in the earlier part of the story. This process of transformation peaks at the end of the story when after Somesh's unexpected murder she is given a coarse, plain white sari as the fitting outfit for an Indian widow. Sumita rejects the white sari in favour of her cream blouse and long brown skirt, clothes that symbolize her emancipation. In fact, she decides not to accompany her in-laws to India where "at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings" (Divakaruni 33). On the contrary, she sees in the mirror the reflection of a woman whose "eyes [are] apprehensive yet steady" (Divakaruni 33). Sumita's changing role from a docile housewife into someone resolved to start a new independent life in America implies that her personality is not fixed.

What Sumita undergoes in the story is a transformation that enables her to cope with life after Somesh's brutal murder. The change in her is a confirmation of Simone de Beauvoir's words "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman" because in them Beauvoir reiterates the reference to an identity that is not a given, but is established or imposed over time, and therefore not stable (qtd. in Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"519). Judith Butler also voices the same doctrine in her

essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” Women in Sumita’s situation perform their perfectly traditional role as expected by society; in Butler’s words, it is an example of gender, which “is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” 519). However, this gendered self is capable of change, as happens in Sumita’s case, because as Butler puts it, “reified and naturalized conceptions of gender might be understood as constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” 520). Therefore, Sumita may be regarded as an embodiment of a differently constituted gender, which Butler denominates as “a performative accomplishment” (ibid).

Meera Bose, the protagonist of “A Perfect Life” is another example of Butler’s theory of the performative, therefore shifting identities of women. Meera changes from a career conscious, ambitious banker to the loving mother of Krishna, an abandoned boy. A successful banker with an American boyfriend, living in a beautiful apartment in the foothills with a view of the Golden Gate Bridge, she believes she has a truly happy life with Richard and feels happy about the smart routine of her daily life. Her “perfect” American existence, however, falls apart with the appearance of a boy of about seven at her doorstep, who is alone, afraid and unwilling to talk. For reasons unknown to herself, Meera takes him in, an action that changes her life forever. She becomes less of a professional and more of a mother from the day she shelters Krishna in her home. Even her relationship with Richard is strained because of the boy and she visualizes a future where Krishna grows up with her, without Richard anywhere in the picture.

In Meera’s life, continuity and discontinuity alternate in the making and unmaking of her identity. She is a successful worker, and is disdainful of friends who compromise everything for the sake of motherhood; nevertheless, she embraces Krishna at the risk of failing in her career. Christine Sylvester observes (1994) that this kind of duality is explicable through a combination of “the feminist standpoint effort to interpret the subject women, and the postmodern effort to examine how specific subjects came to be (or not) and what they have to say” (59). “New forms and mobilities of subjectivity”, according to Sylvester, can replace “single-subject categories”

without denying “the currently existing subject” (ibid). From this strand of discourse, the possibility of multiple subject positions within postmodern feminist identity is plausible. Meera breaks the single-subject category to accommodate both motherly and professional selves by making a routine to do justice to both the roles she had opted for. In doing so she has to make compromises on both sides; however, this is how she contains the dual identities, providing an example of Julia Kristeva’s theorization of a subject-in process. Meera’s subjecthood is irreducible to a single attribute although her dual roles comply with culturally defined patterns. As a mother, she imagines herself in the existing culturally prescribed form, by taking care of Krishna, educating him, and establishing him in life. In this sense her enacting of gender roles is not a “radical act of creation”; she is, on the contrary, renewing her cultural history in her own terms (Butler 40:1986). Therefore, Meera’s adaptation of dual roles is both a conscious choice and an enactment of culturally designed gender roles.

Divakaruni starts the short story “The Disappearance” with these abrupt sentences: “[h]e was a good husband. No one could deny it. He let her have her way, indulged her, even” (171-172). This ironic statement, narrated from the third person point of view, brings out the central theme of “The Disappearance”. It is interesting that the author keeps the characters anonymous. The naïve, plain voice account of the husband’s attitude towards the wife exposes the extreme domestic oppression he inflicts upon her. Divakaruni’s clever use of the sustained tone in the third person is an effective tool for pointing out the silent violence and tremendous psychological trauma the wife has had to undergo in her married life. Instead of castigating the husband, Divakaruni uses irony and sarcasm to deflate his blindly proud claim of being a good husband.

The wife in the short story “The Disappearance” had been a good wife and good mother until the day of her disappearance. However, there has been a spark in her that craved for an individual identity. Because of it, she can be said to embody the kind of "performative acts" coined by Judith Butler. She contains dual identities−one of a docile housewife, another of a rebel eager to disclose her distinctive identity (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” 521). When the husband first met her in Kolkatta during bride-viewing she appeared to be a very traditional girl. “She had sat, head bowed, jasmine plaited into her hair, silk sari draped modestly over her shoulders, just like all the other prospective brides he’d seen” (Divakaruni 171). However, she also has a cool, considerate

look in her eyes. “Almost disinterested, almost as though *she* were wondering if he would make a suitable spouse” (emphasis in original, ibid). Underneath the ideal wife and mother, the rebelliousness streak of the girl has always been active and looking for outlets. She wants to buy American clothes, resume studies and even start a career. However, the husband always makes sure that she does not have her way. He rather gives her the freedom to choose the colour of the kitchen tiles, thinking that he has granted thereby considerable leeway to her. After years of subjugation in the name of love, the girl chooses to leave everything behind, even her only child, by disappearing without leaving behind any clue.

The dual identity of the girl, of an ideal wife and mother on the outside, and a rebel inside, expresses the contradictions in her character. She takes out her ornaments from the bank vault before her calculated acts of disappearance. Like Sumita in “Clothes”, she performs her role in the patriarchal space of the house. Trapped in this oppressive space, she seems to be, in Beauvoir’s words, mutilated and doomed to “repetition and routine” (496). The breaking away of the wife from tedious conjugal life reconfirms the performative nature of her gender. Gender often bears cultural meanings that dictate a person’s social behaviour. Feminists refute the “causal explanations” that claim sexual attribution behind “certain social meanings for women's experience” (Butler 520). Based on this split between sex and gender, Butler argues that gender, being formulated by culture, necessitates social behavior and consequently resembles “performative acts within theatrical contexts” (521). The disappeared wife has so far been acting in her given role of a docile wife, only to break away from it at a suitable time. Therefore, the postmodern notion of the fluidity of identity is discernible in her character that is capable of containing multiple identities at the same time.

The last character to be studied from postmodern feminist lenses is Preeti from the story “Doors”. Though Preeti’s character contains more diasporic elements than postcolonial or postmodern ones, it is possible to see her from a postmodern feminist viewpoint since she displays conflicting character traits. In her essay “Identity, Feminist Theory, and Theology” Linell Elizabeth Cady observes that it is likely for postmodern subjects to contain destabilized and conflicting character traits. In postmodern feminism, identity is considered as “not homogenous but destabilized, revealed as the site of a contestation of multiple, conflicting discourses and practices that constitute the subject” (Cady 22). Preeti’s disposition in the story reveals her conflicting subject position which is at the same time contesting and compliant.

As the title of the story suggests, doors play a significant part in the unfolding of the theme of the story. Preeti, who has been living in the USA since she was twelve, decides to marry Deepak, who is "straight out of India" (Divakaruni 183). To her mother's dismay, Preeti sticks to her decision of marrying Deepak, although "deep down she felt a twinge of fear at her ominous tone" (Divakaruni 185). Preeti and Deepak get along quite well in spite of Deepak's inability to understand Preeti's obsession with closing doors. He is "puzzled by all this door shutting" (Divakaruni 188). When asked about her habit by Deepak, Preeti manages only an incoherent answer "I don't know,…I guess I'm just a private person" (Divakaruni 189). Preeti's concept of privacy is not shared by Deepak. For this reason, he fails to understand the shock and trauma Preeti undergoes when Raj, Deepak's childhood friend, comes to live with them. The fact that a complete stranger will inhabit her personal terrain is almost unacceptable to Preeti. She also shudders at Raj's decision of using the dining area as his makeshift bedroom, although this is the area where she enjoys "her quiet morning tea and the newspaper…" (Divakaruni 192).

The contradictory traits in Preeti's character resonate in the tenacity she shows towards Deepak regarding the issue of Raj. She maintains a conciliatory note towards her husband for some time though her privacy has been violently shattered by him. So far unflinching in keeping her privacy intact, Preeti tolerates with unexpected patience Raj's intrusion and Deepak's indifference towards the shattering of her mental peace. Preeti's display of this kind of adjustability at the cost of her privacy is quite unusual, given the fact that she has been raised in America as the only child of her parents. She does not conform to familial and cultural norms either, because she had been promised a backup space; her mother had assured her that she would always have a home with her parents if she ever decided to leave Deepak. Therefore, Preeti's effort to adjust with Deepak does not have its root in any sort of social or cultural pressure. Rather, she tries to communicate with Deepak about the problems that arise because of Raj's staying at their place in a number of affable ways. This particular trait of her character, being utterly concerned about privacy and individualism but nevertheless trying to cope with Raj for the sake of love, makes Preeti an example of a postmodern flexible subject who "often tends to collapse" into different personas, "making it difficult if not impossible to account for agency" (Cady 22). Preeti embodies "in place of a unified subject, … the multiplicity, even fragmentation, within the subject" that has been noted by Linell Cady (ibid).

The character study undertaken in this section reaffirms the postmodern multiplicity of identity in terms of performative gender and fractured agency. The study divulges how Divakaruni's woman characters contain opposing currents crisscrossing the terrain of their hearts. One of postmodernist feminism's claims that the issues of women are plural rather than universal is commensurate with these characters because they, with the fluidity inherent in their identity formation, defy both categorization and generalization.

After the analysis of some woman characters' postmodern feminist propensities from *Arranged Marriage* in the previous paragraphs, I will shift the remaining part of Chapter Four to a study of the diasporic elements in the same characters. Since many of the protagonists are delineated in diasporic space, their encounter with cultural differences, attempts at negotiating them, and their hybridity and resilience will be discussed. The last section of Chapter Four focuses on how diasporic elements sway the contours of the characters' mental terrains by mapping their shifting trajectories.

(iv) Women in the Diaspora: Always in the Flux:

The female characters in *Arranged Marriage* are mostly diasporian as they have undertaken both physical and spiritual journies away from home to an unknown place where cultural shocks await them from the very beginning. Chitra Divakaruni herself faced the same situation after her migration to the USA as a student. In an interview, she shares the experience of her first encounter with foreign culture in a conversation with Patricia Gras:

> Immigration is such a major fact of life here in the United States. You could come from different parts of the world but that whole experience of being in a whole different environment, almost a new world where you have to learn the rules over again, that is something a lot of people here share. (Divakaruni)

It is never easy for expatriate women to adapt to the host culture when they have to learn the rules over again because the whole experience has a disorientating effect. The female characters in *Arranged Marriage* arrive in the USA either as new brides to join their expatriate husbands, who were unknown to them before the wedding, or as students who feel flustered because of the lonely lives they lead, made harder because of the pull of tradition they have brought along with them.

As stated in Chapter Two, diasporic female identity construction is somewhat symmetrical to postcolonial identity formation because diaspora often offers a space to the

expatriates where it becomes necessary for them to re-live national identity. Women are mainly viewed as repositories of ethnic customs and tradition in such a new space. However, since diasporic woman has an individual self like her male counterpart, the inevitable clash between tradition and mutability mark her trajectory in the host country. In the jagged path she takes, the diasporic female tends to immerse herself in the quagmire of tradition and change, only to revive herself at the end with a personal solution to her very personal dilemma. The cultural hybridity the diasporic woman experiences is more vehement and disorientating than diasporic men as women are supposed to uphold ethnic culture in the first place. The diasporic female characters in Divakaruni's stories anthologized in *Arranged Marriage* walk on a tight rope and strike a balance between culture and hybridity. Therefore, their negotiation is ever progressive, their identities always in the making, in a flux.

In the second story "Clothes" of *Arranged Marriage*, the protagonist Sumita to some extent represents Divakaruni's own transformation as a diasporic South Asian woman. Divakaruni's own feelings, which she shares in an interview, are helpful in understanding the fractured identity of Sumita:

> I came from a traditional family and it was an exciting but challenging transition to move to America and live on my own. The world around me was suddenly so different. Immigration was certainly a transformational experience and I tried to explore its intricacies in my early collections such as *Arranged Marriage*. (Divakaruni)

In the story "Clothes" Sumita's character contains opposing currents of tradition and transformation. She plays the role of a traditional daughter-in-law in spite of living in California, thousands of miles away from home. However, she feels exhausted and constantly thinks about living a free life in a separate place. The assimilation and appropriation that can be seen in Sumita represent Divakaruni's own past in India and present status as a diasporic woman. According to Susheila Nasta, South Asian women, even before their diasporic journey, learn about the multicultural and multilingual heritage of the subcontinent. This familiarity somehow develops a sensibility in them that enables them to "adopt not only in the daily transitions (between and across languages and cultures), but in the broader translations of a linguistic process that has historically inscribed such heteroglossic transformations," … (qtd. in Schlote 394). Nasta notes that the multicultural heritage of South Asian women writers enables them

"not only to adapt, to assimilate and appropriate, but also to hybridize, reshape and sometimes deliberately misappropriate"(qtd. In Schlote 394). Sumita's adaptation to the host culture and her psychological acculturation is evident in the fact that she loves American clothing and visualizes life as a working woman who has blended into mainstream American society.

However, we see the contradiction in Sumita as she feels ashamed of herself for seeking an independent life, free from loyalties towards in-laws. She considers how she would have never felt this way had she been living in India. She scolds herself for being westernized. It is also interesting to note that while on the plane en route to California she was full of apprehension about her life with Somesh in America; soothing thoughts of her familiar, brightly colourful, soft saris lying in the suitcase in the belly of the plane assure her about negotiating the unknown future in them. Ironically, in the secret of their bedroom in the small apartment, she feels liberated by wearing bold American clothes like jeans and close-fitting T-shirts. Her contradictory feelings prove that she is going through the typical diasporic dilemma between tradition and acculturation.

At the end, Sumita's rejection of the submissive widowed life in India and her embrace of the new life offered by America indicate her transformation. Despite considering America a "new, dangerous land", she feels confident about her future here (Divakaruni 33). Her character downplays the agony of acculturation at the cost of her quest for an independent self.

Unlike Sumita's poignant but simple acceptance of diasporic life, we find Jayanti Ganguli's complicated relationship with diasporic space and her ambiguous acceptance of the migrant life in the story "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs". Jayanti's response towards American racism at the initial stage of her migration is a combination of disgust, disbelief, and astonishment. However, neither of these sentiments is strong enough to diminish her eagerness to embrace her new life in America, which she imagines will be rewarding in every possible way.

Jayanti Ganguli's first encounter with diasporic space is marked with ambiguity as from the beginning she experiences both its beauty and ugliness. Her initial idolizing of America as a fairy-tale land of beauty and freedom is upset once she enters her uncle and aunt's apartment since it poses a stark contrast to the vision she had gathered from *Good House Keeping* and *Sunset* at the USIS library back home. In the apartment, the smell of stale curry, the rickety furniture, and the dingy walls hung with cheap, ugly prints, and the small room she is to occupy,

make her nostalgic about her own house in Kolkata, which is an aristocratic, cool, spacious colonial building. Bikram, the husband of her aunt Pratima, augments her disappointment by expressing his doubt about her making any American friends. According to him, "The Americans hate us. They're always putting us down because we're dark-skinned foreigners, *kala admi*. Blaming us for their damn economy, for taking away their jobs" (Divakaruni 43).

In spite of such warnings, and despite the dreary neighbourhood of her aunt's place, Jayanti is optimistic about her life in the new country. She imagines her dazzling presence in a classroom and an affair with her handsome professor. She envisions herself in western clothes and bobbed hair. "No arranged marriage like Aunt's for me!" she decides (Divakaruni 45). But after only a few moments she shuts the lenses of her imagination, because of being "…conditioned by a lifetime of maternal censorship,…" she ponders (Divakaruni 45). Inside her mind, this crisscross of liberty and restrain, resentment and fascination, both movements away from and towards roots make Jayanti a perfect diasporic subject.

Aunt Pratima and Uncle Bikram, unlike Jayanti, have seen the darker side of living in a white country as brown people. Bikram's shop had been vandalized and they had lost their savings to live an impoverished, dejected life in a country that like a witch "pretends to give and then snatches everything back" (Divakaruni 54). Nevertheless, as a diasporic woman, Pratima seeks refuse in complete silence against all sorts of deprivation, both domestic and external. Born and raised in an aristocratic Bengali family in Kolkatta, she will have to lead an isolated, miserable life with her husband in Chicago. Though there seems to be a subterranean understanding between them in their agonies, Pratima seems to be a battered woman who mostly remains silent against her bullying husband. In the introduction to the book *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America* Shamita Das Dasgupta analyzes the ambivalent relationship between women and their families by noting that the family is the source of both strength and oppression for women. She notes that while it extends some sort of protection to women, it also tends to control them by imposing certain traditional roles on them even in diasporic space. This argument can be applied to Pratima's situation as evidenced in Dasgupta's words:

> Away from traditional structure of the extended family, which affords some protection, South Asian women in the United States are being victimized in unique ways. Like her

community, family can also be a source of oppression for a South Asian woman, and yet her life is inexorably embedded in it. (*A Patchwork Shawl* 8)

Pratima has to deal with a hostile society as well as an abusive household. However, Jayanti, even after being called "nigger" by some street boys, refuses to share her uncle and aunt's bleak opinion of America. Jayanti's resilience makes her different from her uncle and aunt who live in diasporic space with hatred, disgust, and paranoia in their mind. Jayanti is going to blend in diasporic space, gathering strength from its beauty and exoticism. Here the beauty comes in the form of snowfall that "has softened, forgivingly, the rough noisy edges of things" (Divakaruni 55-56). The new woman Jayanti is not merely an immigrant from South Asia like her aunt and uncle. She is an emissary of a new attitude towards immigration and life in the diaspora. This attitude consists of adaptation and assimilation. It is about taking the positive things from both native and diasporic culture to forge a new identity that is more accommodating and malleable. Jayanti, unlike Bikram and Protima, is aware of the pain of diasporic life, although she is also capable of seeing the brighter side of such a life. At the end of the story, she stretches her hands out to be covered with white snow that blurs the difference between the colour of her brown hand and that of a white American hand. This blurring of races is a painful process. However, she realizes "[a]nd now it makes sense that the beauty and the pain should be part of each other" (Divakaruni56).

Divakaruni's own theory of "dissolving boundaries" seems to be embodied in her portrayal of Jayanti. As a contributor to the online magazine *Boldtype* she once wrote about dissolving boundaries between life and death. In this story, dissolving boundaries among races is celebrated. In *Asian American Autobiographers: A Bio-bibliography,* edited by Guiyou Huang, Sonja H. Streuber comments that in *Arranged Marriage,* Divakaruni "chronicles the ways in which Indian born girls and women balance old beliefs and new desires as they negotiate their social and cultural place in America often under great physical and psychological pressure" (70). This is true for Jayanti as she too learns to negotiate her path in life in the wake of great mental pressure.

However, this assimilation has other intriguing implications that make it more problematic than linear. As Frantz Fanon states in his *Black Skin, White Masks,* when the tormented psyche of the black starts thinking that his/her skin colour is the root of all miseries in

life, he/she tries to bleach everything to set things right. Fanon analyses this obsession in the following words:

> For, in a word, the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it. Whiten the race, save the race, but not in the sense that one might think: not "preserve the uniqueness of that part of the world in which they grew up," but make sure that it will be white. (33)

The dissolving of all colours into white is akin to the obliteration of all races into the unique white race. Jayanti's action of dissolving, in this sense, is not assimilation but complete obliteration of her own identity. She is eager to celebrate melting at the cost of diversity. Therefore, she breaks the typical model of South Asian women who struggle to contain tradition and modernity in order to forge a new identity in diasporic space. However, her deep-rooted custom bound conditioning in India will play a part in her future life. Divakaruni suspends her narrative in the middle to help Jayanti's future mutability remain an open-ended possibility.

Unlike Jayanti, the unnamed protagonist of the next story "The Word Love" finds an alternative to a life lived in the quagmire of tradition and modernity. She stands at the crossroads of two extremes−the absolute tradition symbolized by her mother residing in India and total acculturation represented by her American boyfriend Rex with whom she is living in "sin". Caught between these two, she rejects both, to venture for a third alternative, which is a life that is not lived for others, but only for herself. She learns to love her life for its own sake. Moving beyond standards set by others, she creates her own. Thus, she emerges as a new woman who is ready to face the challenges of an unknown life on her own terms.

"A Perfect Life" is based on some opposite ideas compared to other stories of *Arranged Marriage* in the sense that instead of narrating acculturation, its heroine reverts to native culture after going through adaptation. Meera embodies hybridity as she thinks she has a true American life with Richard and feels happy about the smart routine of her daily life. On the inside, she feels the impulses of westernization as she cherishes the "space" Richard gives her in their shared life. It is interesting to note the extent of her acculturation as she has been raised in a very traditional manner in India. She does not want to carry any baggage of commitment with her

love life. Perhaps, for this reason, she is particularly cautious about not becoming a mother. Meera considers mother-love as something dangerous and Indian "[r]eal and primitive and dangerous, lurking somewhere in the female genes−especially our Indian ones−waiting to attack" (Divakaruni 75). She observes her newly turned mother friends with disgust and pity, thinking them unattractive and intellectually diminished. She thinks her coming to America to become a successful student and professional has every possibility of being ruined because of marriage and child-bearing.

As is described in the third section of this chapter, Meera wonders whether her "Indian side" has anything to do with showering motherly love over Krishna (Divakaruni 80). This reversal of her character is a journey back to her native culture, which she had shunned so far. She becomes less of a professional and more of a mother from the day she shelters Krishna in her home.

After her losing the boy, however, she feels empty and disoriented. She even thinks about going back to India. Perhaps she will never be able to be her old self again. However, she shows resilience in coming back to a routine life, with success in her career and resumption of her relationship with Richard. Meera manages to lead a double life after experiencing the hardest jolt of her life in losing Krishna. Her seemingly smooth life is ruffled whenever she takes unintelligible breaks from her daily routine to look for Krishna, more as an illusory action than a real search. It was as if she were searching not for the boy, but a part of her own lost soul. The coexistence of logic and absurdity, practicality, and illusion, makes her a perfect carrier of two cultures. It makes her different from other people of her home and host countries. In fact, Meera symbolizes the problematic subject position of South Asian American women writers who are "[s]eemingly caught in the crucible of transnationalism, urbanity, consumerism, and postcoloniality,…"(Schlote 394). The reason behind Meera's holding contradictory identities is understandable from the words of Parminder Bhachu: "transnational women interpret and reinterpret their cultural systems in the changing diasporic contexts as cultural entrepreneurs …" (qtd. in Schlote 239). Bhachu observes that diasporic women are more malleable than other diasporic subjects, like young males who tend to become fundamentalists in their reaction to foreign cultures. Meera's character is "deeply diasporic and transnational" (Simal 170).

The careful attempt on the part of Meera to avoid the Indian (according to her) attitude towards marriage and motherhood at the beginning of the story illustrates a turning point in Divakaruni's writing. Through the depiction of Meera's character, Divakaruni "illustrates both the shift away from nationalistic concerns in Asian/American literature (the claiming American stage) and the tendency towards a transnational awareness and towards a post-ethnic problematization of ethnic boundaries" (Simal 170). Meera stands on the borderline of two cultures, unable to decide which one is more fulfilling for her; hence, she is disoriented and discontented.

Another Divakaruni character, the wife in "The Disappearance", also represents diasporic female consciousness well. The wife's actions perfectly contrast with the actions of the mother in the story "The Bats", where the abused woman keeps coming back to the husband. As an immigrant, the wife in the present story has the advantage of ignoring society. A diasporic life gives her definite edge over other women of her home country in helping her make the choice of leaving her husband behind. The new woman of the diaspora has already straddled cultures and therefore feels the pang of rootlessness. It is easier for her to take the decision of breaking free from the shackles of an abusive relationship and looking forward to a different future. Leaving behind the child and taking her jewelry with her, create a reverse pattern of behavior for this Indian born woman. Her mutability breaks all barriers of identity formation and makes it fluid and diasporic in the true sense of the term.

Meena performs the same sort of self-absorbed action in the story "Affair" by leaving her husband Srikant in quest of personal fulfillment. Her affair with an American colleague and her decision to leave home mark the diasporic turn in her character. However, she has to cope with the pull of tradition, as symbolized in her friend Abha. She expresses her dilemma thus: "If I told you I needed to do this to be happy, you'd say happiness isn't as important as doing the right thing…. you'd say, stop being so melodramatic, Meena. So *Californian*. Pull yourself together" (Divakaruni 267). Meena feels ashamed of becoming westernized, although she does not deviate from remaking her identity. Being inspired by Meena, Abha, her more orthodox friend, also ponders on breaking away from her failed marriage. Both Meena and Abha try to break free from the domestic space which Bhabha has termed as "the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-is-the political; the world –

in-the-home" (15). In the introduction to *The Location of Culture* Bhabha observes how the public and private spaces are destabilized once feminism specifies the patriarchal and gendered nature of civil society. Recognizing the patriarchal structure of society also enables women like Meena and Abha to recognize the normalizing process at work inside home, which they then try to break down.

Bhabha's observation in the introduction to *The Location of Culture* "…feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on to the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them" aptly describes the domestic space Meena and Abha are occupying in their diasporic home (15). Seemingly, they are liberated inside domestic space but actually, the overlapping of the private and the public has made "home" a political space, leaving them in an unhomely existence. They are desperately trying to overcome this disorientation by creating a room of their own. They are now hovering over an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" that "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity…" (Bhabha 5).

Not only Meena and Abha, but many of the characters of Divakaruni as well, discussed in the present chapter, occupy this interstitial passage of mutable identities. Bhabha's coining of hybridity as a site of acquiescent identities can be associated with his other idea of "unhomeliness", because the destabilized identity of the diasporic subject makes him/her incapable of resembling his/her old self (13). For Bhabha, the unhomeliness is "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (ibid).The diasporic characters analyzed in this chapter are classic cases of cultural hybridity. With the passage of time, they are gradually transformed and learn to recognize their own needs. It is not a process of westernization; rather it's a moment of self-awakening. The distinctive feature of Indian diasporic women is their learning to shape and reshape their identities with time. The diasporic notion of feminist identity formation advocates this kind of fluidity. Actually, the new women of the Indian diaspora eschew all types of categorization. This quality makes them appropriate diasporic subjects.

The next chapter, Chapter Five, studies the female characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* within the theoretical frame of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism. Though this dissertation deals with different texts by Bharati Mukherjee,

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, there are many common points of references among them. The female characters created by these different writers have common issues that create the possibility of inter-textual study. Therefore, the discussion will sometimes take a back and forth approach, or in other words, opt for a circular trajectory.

Chapter Five

When Diasporic Experience Takes a Transnational Turn: Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short story collection *Arranged Marriage*, discussed in the previous chapter revealed recurrent thematic aspects in the lives of first or second-generation immigrant South Asian women and in their emotional involvements with their male partners. These themes resonate throughout the book; all other happenings of life revolve around this central theme of emotional attachment. Although Jhumpa Lahiri, whose short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* is studied in the present chapter, also places her female characters at critical junctures of life, those do not always necessarily involve emotional attachment with a male partner. The woman characters in Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* inhabit both familial spaces and spaces outside the home. They interact not only with family members but also other people in public spaces. As both first and second-generation diasporic women, they encounter situations that are unknown to their American or resident Indian counterparts. Chapter Five thus studies the identity negotiation of Lahiri's South Asian diasporic female characters from the perspectives of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminism.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born to Bengali Indian immigrants in London, but moved with her family to the United States when she was three years old. She grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island. Being a second-generation South Asian American, Lahiri describes her position as an "amalgamated domain" (qtd. in Ridda 1). However, in Lahiri's case, this "amalgamated domain" seems to empower her character, instead of creating bafflement in it. Maria Ridda comments:

> By extension, the "amalgamated domain" Lahiri mentions equates to the creation of a performative space, an imaginary homeland, restoring through fictionality what could otherwise be lost. It escapes easy categorization, yet renders her texts emblematic of an Indian-English-American diasporic sensibility that accommodates two specific urban sites: Calcutta and New York. (1)

The multiple identities empower Lahiri to explore more than one sensibility and site to create complex characters out of her own experience that "escapes easy categorization" (Ridda 1).

Indeed, almost all major characters in her fiction defy predictability by extending their horizons beyond their lived spaces, both physically and psychologically.

One point of departure for Lahiri from the writing of other South Asian diasporic writers is that many of her characters repudiate the binaries of home/host land in favor of a third space that inculcates a sense of liberation in them by setting them free from cultural orientations. A number of Lahiri's characters move in and out of fixed spaces like nomads. Some female characters of *Unaccustomed Earth* find a liberated identity in the third space that allows them to follow the reckonings of their hearts and leave behind the cultural baggage of the past.

However, Lahiri also indicates through her fiction that complete rejection of one's cultural background is not always possible, especially for diasporic women, who are often seen as mediators between two cultures. Ashima Ganguli, the mother of Gogol in *The Namesake,* is a case in point. Lahiri's short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* also, like *The Namesake,* features woman characters from first and second-generation migrants who are poignantly torn between two cultures. They tread on the borderline where they feel lonely, being unable to share the idiosyncratic pain they undergo with anyone else. For example, in the "Hema and Kaushik" part of *Unaccustomed Earth*, which is the story of two second-generation migrants who fall in love, the male protagonist Kaushik never needs to compromise his status as a nomad whereas the woman protagonist Hema, going against her emotion and instinct, marries Navin in order to settle down in life, since such settlement is seen as the only desirable goal for a woman. In *The Lowland*, we see the story of Gouri, who breaks all traditions to pursue a place for herself in life. She achieves remarkable scholarly success, but only to endure a vast hollowness in her life, as is obvious towards the end of the novel. At that point, she tries to reconnect with her daughter to overcome the futility of life.

One of Lahiri's recurrent tropes is conflict between generations, usually in the form of parents and children. The character analysis from the book *Unaccustomed Earth* includes a study of first and second-generation women migrants since these two groups reveal interesting character traits in their reaction to, and negotiation with, diasporic situations. In this regard, it is pertinent to note the observations of two psychologists, Shiraev and David Levy, who observe in the Preface to their *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Critical Thinking and Contemporary Applications* "[w]hile observing the facts about today's world, many critics contend that the

basic differences between cultural groups are, and always will be, irreconcilable" (ix). About the people of the host country, they add "[b]ut many countries continue to be split along ethnic and religious lines"(ibid). In migrant people, these authors see a dichotomy between "traditional culture" and "nontraditional culture"(10). Whereas traditional culture, in their words, is "a cultural construct rooted in traditions, rules, symbols, and principles established predominantly in the past" the latter is "based on new principles, ideas, and practices" (ibid). Shiraev and Levy observe that people who represent traditional cultures are reluctant to accept new knowledge for two different reasons. Some "do not want to face the uncertainty" of adapting to a new way of life in the host country, while others "do not want to lose their cultural identity" (11). In the light of these observations, one can see that most first generation women immigrants from *Unaccustomed Earth* can be seen as clinging to traditional culture, whereas the second generation fits well in the category of nontraditional culture. About people following nontraditional cultures, Shiraev and Levy observe that they "embrace the ideology of liberal individualism, which emphasizes the supremacy of individual liberties and freedom to choose" (11). Although freedom of choice is initially considered a positive development, the two psychologists note, "the presence of too many options can lead to the development of psychological problems" (ibid).

The presence of too many options pose a problem to the nontraditional diasporic women of Lahiri's fictions. They often find themselves at crossroads in life where it is difficult for them to decide which way out would be best for them. It can be added that second-generation woman migrants also have to deal with the additional emotional pressure of parents who persist as a kind of conscience in them. Such pressure also increases the distance between parents and children. Many of the texts to be discussed in this chapter deal with generational issues. Generational conflict in the diaspora is thus studied along with postcolonial and postmodern feminism in Chapter Five.

Having sketched the thematic issues involved, the chapter now studies some of the author's own evaluations of her works. When asked about the role of ethnic identity in her writing by Julia Leyda, Jhumpa Lahiri emphasizes the issues of "character, plot, language, style, form, consistency, and continuity" over "sociological, cultural, identity-based" projects. She

feels comfortable in viewing her books as creative works rather than as projects upholding certain cultural identities. She observes:

> I've never felt that I had a project as a writer in that sense, in any kind of sociological, cultural, identity-based way – I've never felt that. I've always just thought nuts and bolts: character, plot, language, style, form, consistency, and continuity. You know, those ideas, those ideas of the making of it. Perhaps I'm incapable of thinking consciously about the beyond. (n.pag.)

However, Lahiri is also conscious about her ethnicity and aware of how this identity influences the expectation of her readers. In the same interview she notes:

> And I realize that there are a lot of people out there who assume that I do have a project as a writer and that I'm writing specifically for a certain audience. That's what the books are for; that's their purpose. I've talked to people who are astonished that people who aren't of Indian descent read my books. These are Americans, living in today's world. (n.pag.)

Lahiri assents thus that her books are not to be limited to a certain section of people. She would like her books to be read by general readers including mainstream Americans. She does not intend her writing to be confined to certain ethnic and cultural biases. This intention is justified in the sense that in addition to cultural conflicts, her characters have to undergo general human predicaments that are not confined to specific geographical, historical, and cultural spaces. However, parts of the chapter that follow construe Lahiri's female characters of *Unaccustomed Earth* in their historical and cultural contingencies to fathom how far they have been mutated in the construction of their diasporic identities.

In what follows I will first show how Lahiri's female characters mirror postcolonial feminism in *Unaccustomed Earth*. Then I will focus on how the characters reflect postmodern feministic aspects. Finally, I will demonstrate how the characters contain diasporic features in them and how some of them tend to become transnational in their outlook.

(i) Mirroring of Postcolonial Feminism in *Unaccustomed Earth*:

Jhumpa Lahiri's portrayal of woman characters in her novels does not reveal any linear development. Many of the characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* are depicted as already occupying a negotiated culturally hybrid space whereas Ashima, in her second book *The Namesake,* has to pass through a difficult process of acculturation before attaining hybridity. The significant female characters in both these aforementioned books represent different stages of their diasporic trajectories and reflect distinctive orientations in carving individual identities. In *Unaccustomed Earth* Lahiri makes use of diversity in portraying female characters as in the preceding two books. However, broadly speaking, the attempt to adapt to the new soil of America, creates in the process, a sort of similarity among them that Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero characterizes as striving "for a level of negotiated inclusion in their new American lives" …(2). Emphasizing the common postcolonial past of these characters, Forero divides their diasporic trajectory into three phases, namely "from postcolonial to immigrant to American"…(ibid). Forero comments, "the balance between negotiation and inclusion depends on the extent to which each sees herself translated from postcolonial to immigrant to American" (ibid). The extent to which each of Lahiri's characters is translated from postcolonial to American immigrant indicates the differences each of the characters in upholding their own identities. Therefore, in spite of the convergences among these female immigrants, the divergences are also significant as they indicate different levels of their individual transformation of the self.

An analysis of the female characters of *Unaccustomed Earth* against the backdrop of postcolonial feminism brings together the characters' shared history and their individual journey towards forging a new identity in diasporic space. The identity formation of the female characters from *Unaccustomed Earth* is fraught with crosscurrents of tradition and modernity, and is explored in this chapter with reference to their postcolonial pasts.

When a person has to negotiate his/her identity in diasporic space, s/he has to do it at the cost of acculturation. His/her adaptation means a confluence of his/her native culture with the host culture in a manner that might prove detrimental to the former. In the face of such a difficult situation, a subject forms an alternative cultural site where "the contradictions of immigrant histories are read, performed, and critiqued" (Lowe ix-x). In the preface of her book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* Lisa Lowe speculates how this alternative cultural site influences an Asian American subject's identity formation. She notes:

> My discussions consider Asian American cultural forms as sites for the emergence of subjects and practices that are not exhausted by the narrative of American citizenship. Culture is the terrain through which the individual speaks as a member of the contemporary national collectivity, but culture is also a mediation of history, the site through which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect or disavowed. (x)

Lowe indicates thus how cultural mediation works for Asian Americans in attaining American citizenship. She further explains how culture bridges contemporary national convictions and history. She carefully observes that this history can be fragmented, imperfect, or even disavowed; nevertheless, the connection between subjects and history, mediated by culture, exists no matter what. A number of female characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* exemplify this fragmented tie with their history in the mediation of identity in the diasporic space of the USA.

Interestingly, a number of mother figures appear in the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth* who contrast with their daughters. Seen together, they reveal a contrasting picture of first and second-generation diasporic South Asian women reacting differently when faced with the question of acculturation. The integration of the daughters into the mainstream American culture often renders their mothers isolated and struggling at the crossroads of life where they have to undergo extreme mutations. The next section mainly focuses on the mothers' negotiation between the culture of a postcolonial past and the culture of the host country.

Unaccustomed Earth, as noted earlier, tells the tale of matriarchs who differently translate their postcolonial pasts in diasporic space. Ruma's mother in the title story "Unaccustomed Earth" navigates with ease between her past and present cultural identities, albeit while in close proximity to her native culture. She retains her Indian identity through three basic tropes−food, language, and dress. Unlike other members of her family, she is the one who always clings to her native culture. However, she leaves a profound influence on her daughter Ruma after her death because of which Ruma ruminates excessively over her words, actions, and thoughts in her new home at Seattle. It is noteworthy that the story opens with reference to Ruma's mother's death though it is her father who comes to spend a week with them in their new

house. The absent mother's presence is felt vividly as both father and daughter reminisce about the past throughout the narrative as alternative focalizers.

The microcosmic India the mother creates in their suburban American life at Pennsylvania is not imposed upon her as a duty, since none in the family cares much for Indian food and customs. It is solely her own yearning to keep her past alive that drives the mother in her endeavors. Notably, her name is never given in the story; the third person narrator, using Ruma's perspective, mostly refers to her as "her mother". Women have often been made to symbolize a nation since one's country of birth is considered as one's motherland. Elleke Boehmer observes that in nationalist imaginings "mother figures bulk large…" (88). However, this symbolizing of women as "mother nation" is not innocent as they are almost invariably "denied any direct relation to national agency" (Mc Clintock 90). That is, although women are symbolized as vessels carrying national customs and culture, they are denied any significant place in the making real changes in national histories.

Ruma's mother is enacting her postcolonial past in the diasporic space of the USA by wearing saris and cooking Indian cuisine. Unlike Ruma, her mother used to make food an elaborate affair and "[n]ever cut corners; even in Pennsylvania she had run her household as if to satisfy a mother-in-law's fastidious eye" (Lahiri 22). She tried to change her American son-in-law Adam's and the half-American grandson Akash's palate continuously by feeding them Indian dishes. She taught her daughter recipes to serve her family, which Ruma no longer uses, partly due to incapability, and partly because of Akash's changed food habits. Apart from cooking, her mother maintains other Indian customs like not eating dinner before her husband. When her father worked at the garden till late at night, Ruma told her mother to have dinner. However, "her mother, trained all her life to serve her husband first, would never consider such a thing" (Lahiri16).

Ruma's mother represents her home culture in a bid to uphold what Anne McClintock terms as "nationalist imaginings" that depend on gender differences to a great degree. McClintock comments on this project of using women as national symbol in the following words:

> Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit…. Women are typically

> constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency. (90)

Hovering in the shadow of her husband, Ruma's mother, who did not work outside and did not drive, was all but excluded from practicing active agency as an immigrant in America. Her effort at preserving Indian customs extenuates the mediated identity she attempts to forge in the host country. Her 218 saris, her singing Bengali songs to Akash, and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, gesture at her attempt to keep her native culture alive. Elleke Boehmer terms this attitude on the part of women as "tactics of self-representation" which are usually adopted from "the more established and yet compromising nationalist politics of their male counterparts" (90). In the title story of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Ruma's mother thus attempts to preserve her past life through three cultural tropes−food, language, and dress. However, she also creates an inclusive life in her diasporic existence by sculpting a happy space around herself. She loves to have American flower plants and other kitchen plants in her garden. She reaches outside herself and befriends her daughter, planning trips together. In doing so, she reminds readers of Ashima in *The Namesake* since both of them negotiate their identities successfully in diasporic space by clinging to their past as cultural carriers, still creating a hybrid existence in order to fashion a transnational existence. Ruma's mother's intimate relationship with Adam, Ruma's American husband, and her enjoyment of life in America, and trip planning, all indicate her acceptance of diasporic life as liberating rather than restraining.

The next story of the collection "Hell-Heaven," in spite of containing major differences, resembles "Unaccustomed Earth" in a number of ways. Both stories explore mother-daughter relationships using the daughter's viewpoint. The third person narrator in "Unaccustomed Earth" alternately assumes Ruma and her father's perspective, whereas in "Hell-Heaven" the first person narration of Usha's (the daughter) younger self is used. Here an adult Usha reflects upon her childhood, which is heavily tinted by her mother's presence, and which reminds one of the memory of Ruma's mother that occupies a large portion of "Unaccustomed Earth." Both fathers in the stories are insensitive to some extent towards the emotional needs of their wives, who in turn feel disoriented in their new surroundings.

However, Aparna, the mother in "Hell-Heaven", shows less resilience compared to Ruma's mother in the first few years of her stay at Harvard. In a sense, Aparna is doubly

diasporic because prior to their stay at Boston, Aparna and her husband lived in Berlin where her husband was completing his training in microbiology. Before that period, Aparna lived in India where her marriage had been arranged by their two families. But there was a mismatch as far as family backgrounds were concerned. Aparna was born and brought up in North Kolkata in a cultural ambience of music, film, leftist politics, and poetry. Her husband, on the other hand, was born and raised in a suburb twenty miles outside Kolkata. As a result of this difference in their backgrounds, Aparna and her husband do not make a compatible couple and she feels lonely.

One sustaining theme of "Hell-Heaven" is Aparna's struggle to acculturate in the USA by conquering the vast loneliness she suffered initially due to a loveless marriage. Seen through the young eyes of Usha, Aparna's seven-year-old daughter, the love relationship between Aparna and Pranab, a newly arrived student of engineering at MIT, seems to be the only thing that sustains Aparna in her struggle to overcome the woes of diasporic life. As mentioned earlier, Aparna's marriage was arranged in India with a man with whom she had nothing in common. Usha describes her father as someone who was "wedded to his work, his research, and he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate" (Lahiri 68).

It is significant that Aparna retains the cultural mores and customs of her past even in the bleakest hours of her life. Before meeting Pranab she had a miserable life. Instead of being acculturated, she maintained a lifestyle then that resembled her pre-immigrant days. Usha describes Pranab's first impression of her mother in the following words:

> … my mother was wearing the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, and a common Tangail sari, and had a thick stem of vermilion powder in the center parting of her hair, …. He noticed the two or three safety pins she wore fastened to the thin gold bangles that were behind the red and white ones, which she would use to replace a missing hook on a blouse or to draw a string through a petticoat at a moment's notice, a practice he associated strictly with his mother and sisters and aunts in Calcutta. (61)

Usha's summing up of her mother's embodiment of her cultural identity and Pranab's instant identification with it anticipates the close relationship these two people are going to develop.

After Aparna and Pranab's first meeting, she invites him to their apartment and serves him curried mackerel and rice. Aparna holds on to her cultural identity in domestic affairs like

Ashima in *The Namesake*, but unlike her, she fails to translate her diasporic identity by accommodating to the changes needed for acculturation.

Her past lingers with Aparna even after her meeting with Pranab. She never meets him alone. Usha observes, "I was always there when he visited. It would have been inappropriate for my mother to receive him in the apartment alone; this was something that went without saying" (Lahiri 64). Since Aparna's husband was unenthusiastic about food, she found immense pleasure in preparing elaborate Indian dishes for Pranab, who gorged himself on her cooking. Thus, Aparna's enactment of her home culture in diasporic space attains fulfillment with Pranab's help.

Aparna's life in Boston is a faithful replication of what Geraldine Heng calls "the nationalist imaginary−that undisclosed ideological matrix of nationalist culture" (31). Heng notes that nationalism supports women's issues up to a certain extent because it requires "a definitional apparatus to imagine and describe itself, to constitute itself ideologically, and to win an essential symbolic momentum" (ibid). According to Heng, women and the feminine have conventionally anchored the nationalist imaginary. Since Aparna embodies such nationalist culture, she adheres to her Bengaliness to such an extent that she vehemently protests Usha's American ways of dress and food habit. Even her own feelings for Pranab is conditioned by her culture as she never expresses her feeling for him. As Usha observes, "[s]he knew that she could never have Pranab Kaku for herself,…"(Lahiri 67).

Another mother, from the next story "Only Goodness," proves herself to be a typical, traditional subject who upholds her home culture, uncontaminated by any effort at acculturation. Lahiri endows the least agency to Sudha and Rahul's mother from "Only Goodness" among all the matriarchs she portrays in *Unaccustomed Earth*. The anonymous mother exists on the fringes of the story and is only mentioned in passing. However, that brief appearance conforms to a traditional Indian mother figure, as Sudha recalls that her younger brother Rahul "was allowed to wear shorts in summer, to play sports in school, things her mother considered inappropriate for a girl" (Lahiri 137). The only time the mother raises her voice is when Rahul is arrested for drunk driving. Even then she, instead of acting in a practical way, acts in an over protective manner, as if her child could do nothing wrong. Sudha analyzes her mother's disposition in the following words:

> Sudha pitied her mother, pitied her refusal to accommodate such an unpleasant and alien fact, her need to blame America and its laws instead of her son. She sensed that her father understood….(143)

The apparently detrimental and liminal subjectivity of the mother, however, can be construed in a reversible way. Like Aparna in "Hell-Heaven", this woman is also doubly diasporic because after leaving India, she had settled in London with her husband before finally moving to Massachusetts after four years. Sudha defines her parents' marriage as "neither happy nor unhappy," lacking "emotion in either extreme" (Lahiri 137). Her mother's life in America is bleak compared to her existence of England. Isolated from both husband and children, she turns inward, although that does not mean complete inertia.

The life of Sudha's mother in London was about the days, "when immigration was still an adventure, living with paraffin heaters, seeing snow for the first time" (Lahiri 138). Sudha contemplates a few pictures of her parents taken at London in which her mother looks unrecognizably slim and stylish in glamorous saris, with hair styled at a salon. Lahiri also reveals that in London the mother had been working toward a certificate in Montessori education. However, life in Wayland was like facing a "life sentence of being foreign" for her where she did not work or drive, and when she put on twenty pounds, may be as a byproduct of the depression she was experiencing in diasporic life (ibid).

The huge reversal in the mother's lifestyle is her way of creating identity in diasporic space. The first portion of her diasporic life in London was an enthusiastic attempt at acculturation whereas life in America marks the phase of resisting the host culture and attempting to hold on to the past. Sudha recalls that her mother occasionally put in their lunch boxes "potato curry sandwiches that tinted Wonderbread green" (Lahiri 143). We also learn that she has retraced the old habit of drinking tea instead of coffee. Whenever there is an occasion in the house, she fills the dining table with traditional Indian food such as rice and pantuas[4].

It is no wonder that Sudha's parents decide to go back to Kolkata after her marriage and eventual settle down in England. None of her parents, especially the mother, could successfully adapt to life in America. The mother was perpetually holding on to her past, without any attempt

[4] Pantua is a local delicacy from the Indian subcontinent, notable in eastern India and Bangladesh. It is a traditional Bengali sweet made of deep-fried balls of semolina, chhana, milk, ghee, and sugar syrup.

to accommodate to any change. In fact, her identity formed around her resistance to change and attempts at clinging to the home culture in spite of being doubly diasporic.

The last characters to be studied in this section of the Chapter are Hema, her mother, and Kaushik's stepmother Chitra from Part Two of *Unaccustomed Earth,* which is titled "Hema and Kaushik." This part has a skewed narrative style as the three connected stories included here have three different narrators. The first part, called "Once in a Lifetime," narrated by Hema, is the one in which her mother makes the most of her appearance. "Year's End" is the second part where Kaushik is the narrator. There is third person narration in the last story "Going Ashore" while Hema takes over with a first-person perspective at the end. It is thus that the alternating focalizers of the stories give the readers an intimate glimpse into their lives. Readers get to know the inner thoughts of the person whose perspective is used in these stories, thereby coming closer to the life and thoughts of the narrator.

Despite being a second-generation American immigrant, the unfolding of Hema's identity in "Hema and Kaushik" reveals a woman intensely rooted in her culture in curious ways. Hema, in other word, in many senses is a deeply diasporic character, for she exhibits traits that are explored at length in the third section of the present chapter. However, she reveals a side of her identity that is aligned with her past, and to the traditions that her parents tried to keep alive in their diasporic existence, before moving back to Kolkata. This attachment to tradition prompts Hema to enter a loveless marriage with Navin instead of accepting the uncertain, yet passionate love of Kaushik.

"Once in a Lifetime" is the first story of the second part of *Unaccustomed Earth*. The special feature of this story is that, as in Lahiri's earlier works "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's," a young girl, Hema, narrates "Once in a Lifetime". She observes everything through the eye of a second-generation immigrant. Her observations of the parents are remarkably neutral, and she writes about them almost like an onlooker who has no emotional attachment to them. Hema's narration conforms to Michael Cox's observation that "child observers, untainted by the effects of prolonged enculturation, bring to the narrative forefront those conflicts or core issues…that arise between and among native and immigrant groups" (qtd. in Campbell-Hall 293-294).

Hema's narrative opens with her reflection on her life in 1974, when she was six years old. She remembers that at that time her family was arranging a farewell party for Kaushik's

family members who were moving back to India from Cambridge. Hema's mother Shibani is described in this opening part of the story as a careful host, who spent hours in polishing furniture, preparing the dining table, and cooking lamb curry and pullao. Her preparation and the fact that all people on the guests' list are Indians, point to the fact that Hema's family, particularly her mother, prefer to stick to their home culture, even though they struggle to make their diasporic lives a success in foreign soil.

Hema then describes the traditional Indian dress that her grandmother sent from Kolkata. Though her mother insists on her wearing the dress on the day of the farewell party, Hema wants to wear something else. Her description of Shibani's dress also proves the latter's cultural orientation. Shibani is "in a sari, wearing vermilion in her hair" (Lahiri 224). The contrasting picture that follows between Hema and Kaushik's mothers reveals the difference between the two women. Whereas Parul (Kaushik's mother) comes from an aristocratic family based in Jodhpur Park, Hema's grandparents live in a modest flat in Maniktala. Parul has an upper class and elite upbringing but Shibani spent her pre-marriage life in a shabby house amidst poverty. The background of Shibani shows her lower middle-class status back in Kolkata, which Hema describes in the following way:

> … and my mother's modest flat in Maniktala, above a grimy Punjabi restaurant, where seven people existed in three small rooms….My mother's father was a clerk in the General Post Office, and she had neither eaten at a table nor sat on a commode before coming to America. (225)

Her lower middle-class status is an important aspect of the mother's identity because in post-independent India, this class, along with the middle one, devised certain codes for their women. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid comment on the middle-class women's status as one segregated from other classes of society. They observe:

> A new kind of segregation is imposed on women, whose identity is now to be defined in opposition to women from lower economic strata. This process is not dissimilar to the one which pushed the middle-class woman into the seclusion of private sphere as a mark of class status and superiority (among other things) in Victorian England. (11)

Shibani, as a member of this middle-class ambiance, has been raised in a secluded way, in the private sphere of the house. She expresses her fidelity to her upbringing in the USA through preserving the culture and custom of her homeland. Sangari and Vaid further note that in the middle-class culture "home" is defined as "the insulated private sphere" which is supposed to be "free from even temporary challenges to male authority" (12). Shibani shows her strong conformity to this ideal by disapproving Dr. Choudhuri's indulgence towards his wife Parul. She thought, "your [Kaushik's] father was too indulgent, too solicitous of your mother, always asking if she needed a fresh drink, bringing down a cardigan if she was cold" (Lahiri 245). Thus, Shibani does not approve of the wife given priority over the husband.

In spite of adapting to numerous changes in her diasporic life, Shibani clings to several customs of her past. These contradictory traits of her identity can be explained in Sangari and Vaid's observation, "her various shapes continuously readapt the 'eternal' past to the needs of the contingent present" (10). For example, she celebrates Christmas at home but makes Hema sleep in their room on a cot, although she is almost thirteen, considering "the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice…" (Lahiri 229). Further contradiction is found in her predilection for American cinema. Though she never wore a skirt, thinking that to be indecent, "she could recall, scene by scene, Audrey Hepburn's outfits in any given movie" (Lahiri 231).

Whereas her mother's conformity to home culture can be attributed to her past, Hema's own adherence to the same culture seems to be a puzzling side of her identity. Born and brought up in America, Hema found her occasional trips to India boring. Having no particular attachment to her original roots, she seems to blend smoothly into mainstream American life. Nevertheless, a few features of her identity are symmetrical to her inherited culture. This trait of her personality proves that although occupying diasporic space, Hema cannot completely deny her postcolonial past.

The last segment of "Hema and Kaushik", "Going Ashore", opens with Hema's solitary journey to Rome, a place with which she has profound intellectual connection. This is because after once attending a lecture about Etruscan references in Virgil at Boston, she had felt an intense interest in the Etruscans. She planned under false pretenses her lonely stay at Rome prior to her marriage with Navin in Kolkata, the city where her parents live now, after having spent many years in Massachusetts. This brief get away seems to be her last breath of fresh air before her marriage, that is, according to her, already "dead" (Lahiri 301).

Even though Hema "was only conscious of its [her marriage] deadness," she agrees to marry Navin because she does not want to approach "middle age without a husband, without children," (Lahiri 298, 301). The conflicting currents of Hema's character are evident in Lahiri's commentary on Hema's innermost thoughts:

> It was her inability, ultimately, to approach middle age without a husband, without children, with her parents living now on the other side of the world, and yet to own a home and shovel the driveway when it snowed and pay her mortgage bill when it came—though she had proven to herself, to her parents, to everyone, that she was capable of all of those things—it was her unwillingness to abide that life indefinitely that led her to Navin. (289)

The quotation is cited at length to show the ambivalence as far as modernity and tradition are concerned that is a quintessential part of Hema's identity. Her clandestine affair with Julian ultimately failed because of Julian's inability to divorce his wife to marry Hema. Although she is capable of taking care of herself, she needs someone to depend on, and a family to hold on to. Her decision to settle down, however, fails to bring any peace of mind, as she knows that she is not marrying for love.

Generational conflict prompts Hema to conceal parts of her life from her parents, and yet her conformity to their culture, albeit unsatisfactory to her, is something that she cannot overcome. The repeated mention of her failed affair with Julian is a reminder of her prioritizing security over love. She considers marriage to be the desirable and honorable outcome of a love affair, just as her mother would have. The same pattern is repeated when Kaushik tells Hema not to marry Navin, but does not ask her to marry him, "and Hema knew it was not a fair trade" (Lahiri 323).

As a second-generation immigrant, Hema posits a nonlinear, complex identity that has to negotiate between multiple strands. Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma have come up with the term "new cosmopolitanism" to define diasporic subjects like Hema (2). The new cosmopolitan subjects position themselves "always in multiple locations (through travel, or through cultural, racial, or linguistic modalities)" (ibid). Hema was born and raised in Massachusetts; works at Wellesley University, and is now on a trip to Rome, a place she had visited twice before. She

goes to Kolkata just before Christmas to marry Navin. Her itinerary, as well as her choice of language, dresses, and cuisine, reveals the multiplicity of her identity. Lahiri emphasizes Hema's obsession with learning a third language in these words: "[s]ince eighth grade, reading Latin had been an addiction, every line a puzzle to coax into meaning" (Lahiri 299). This fascination for the third language and culture is also evident in Moushumi's passion for French in *The Namesake*, since she too, like Hema, negotiates with a nonlinear, complex identity[5].

The traditional turn in Hema's identity is not a replication of her mother's postcolonial past. However, her childhood and adolescent conditioning under the supervision of a traditional mother has had undeniable sway on her adult self. Along with this background, the polyvalence of her new cosmopolitan identity makes Hema an example of postcolonial femininity in diasporic space. Bandana Purkayastha notes that women like Hema and Moushumi "have to contend with the overreaching demands for conformity that are placed on non-white immigrants to prove they are "American," as well as dealing with the demands made by the hegemonic ethnic group to uphold an upper caste, upper-class orthodox form of Hindu Indianness"(14). This dealing with divergent demands leaves Hema with an ambivalent personality. Through the episode of her losing the childhood gold bangle, a gift from her grandmother that she had kept with her for a long time, Lahiri deftly captures the multiplicity of Hema's identity. "She had grown up hearing from her mother that losing gold was inauspicious,.. a dark thought passed through her, that it (the plane) would crash or be blasted apart in the sky" (Lahiri 324). However, the logical part of her mind composes itself after seeing the screen at the center of the plane on which a white line emerges "away from Rome, creeping toward India. And this simple graphic composed her, making clear the only road available now" (ibid). Unlike her mother, Hema knows both her root and route, to be able to make a conscious choice for life, albeit not a satisfying one. This new life is painful for her as it leads her to a loveless marriage.

A stark contrast to Hema is Chitra, Kaushik's stepmother, the last character to be studied in this section of Chapter Five. The widowed mother of two daughters, Chitra married Kaushik's father, who was nearly twenty years older than she was and migrated to the United States.

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5 Like some of her characters, Jhumpa Lahiri herself was so infatuated with Italian that she toiled hard to learn it and wrote her first Italian book, *In Altre Parole* (*In Other Words*) in 2015.

Neither of these actions was her own choice because "[t]he whole thing was arranged by relatives… "(Lahiri 255). Chitra's activities in "Year's End," the second story of "Hema and Kaushik," reveal that she clings to her home culture completely and is unable to assimilate into the host culture in the USA.

When Kaushik visits his home after Chitra's arrival, he feels the heavy smell of cooking in the air. Later he finds "translucent luchis piled on a plate, and several smaller bowls containing dal and vegetables…" (Lahiri 258-9). Like the traditional Indian food that Chitra cooks, her initial appearance seems to Kaushik to be traditional as well. "Her hair was long and dark…. She wore vermilion in her hair, a traditional practice my mother had shunned, the powdery red stain the strongest element of her appearance" (Lahiri 260). It is also noteworthy that she uses Bengali with Kaushik, though he is not fluent in the language. She also changes the look of the fiberglass dining table by covering it with an Indian print. In the center, "there was a stainless-steel plate holding an ordinary salt shaker and two jars of pickles, hot mango, and sweet lime, their lids missing, their labels stained, spoons stuck into their oils" (Lahiri 259). Her disapproval of Scotch led Kaushik's father to hide the bottle of Johnnie Walker in a cupboard, the shelves of which now contained "boxes of cereal and packets of chanachur brought back from Calcutta" (Lahiri 266). It is clear from Kaushik's observation that Chitra willingly carries her cultural baggage with her despite her acceptance of migration. She is the kind of an immigrant who not only fails to translate her cultural self, but also reluctant to do so.

Chitra, apart from being incapable of change, is also reluctant to acculturate. She decides not to take driving lessons. When Kaushik tells her that she can get a license since driving is not hard, she says no "not as if she were incapable, but as if driving were beneath her" (Lahiri 270). She finds the house with modernist architecture uncomfortable and finally makes her husband sell the house to move to a more traditional one in a less isolated suburb of Boston. She does so because "[t]here were other Bengalis nearby and an Indian grocery in the town,.." (Lahiri 292). Chitra attempts to keep her identity static, preferring a ghettoized existence, rather than adaptation to mainstream American life. Some sociologists have construed this culturally uncompromising disposition of immigrants by associating it with gender and generational issues. In an article titled "Asian American Identity Development: A Cultural Specific Model for South Asian Americans," the writers opine "[g]ender identity of South Asian Americans varies with generational and educational level…" (Ibrahim, Ohnish and Sandhu 40). They speculate that

Indian and Pakistani Americans, especially from the first generation, differ in their identity development from succeeding generations because they keep maintaining closer ties with their home culture than to the "country-of-adoption culture" (Ibrahim, Ohnish and Sandhu 44). Chitra, a first generation immigrant, opts for "denial or other strategies to negotiate the crisis" by completely identifying herself with South Asian tracts ((Ibrahim, Ohnish and Sandhu 43).

Analyzed from a postcolonial feministic perspective, Chitra's identity can be taken as a corollary of the debate around the terms "memshaheb" and "bhadramahila" (Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India" 625,628). In his essay "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India," Partha Chatterjee provides a commentary on the contrasting pictures of two types of Indian women that were highly contested in the literature of the 19th century India. In the first half of the 19th century, parody and satire castigated Indian of women who imitated the ways of Western ladies in their manners, dress, cosmetics, and jewelry. This group was given the label "memshaheb," the equivalent term of which was invented a few years later as "bhadramahila." This new woman was supposed to be educated to internalize the qualities required "to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world…" (Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India," 629). However, the demarcation was clear between her and Western women and the "memshaheb" through "her dress, her eating habits, her social demeanor, her religiosity" (ibid). Chitra, who works as a schoolteacher in India, upholds the image of the "bhadramahila" in the diasporic space of the United States.

Lahiri depicts Chitra as someone stern and unyielding, firmly rooted to her native culture. However, not all characters of Unaccustomed *Earth* are portrayed in the same way. Some of them struggle in the process of adaptation and end up as having fragmented and split selves. A postmodern feminist approach attempts to study these characters from *Unaccustomed Earth* in the next section.

(ii) Lahiri's Characters Reflecting Postmodern Feministic Aspects:

Since postmodern feminism relies heavily on the instability of subjectivity, the discussion of the present section of Chapter Five centers around some female characters of *Unaccustomed Earth* who repudiate stable categorization and traverse the frontiers of identity. Lahiri reinscribes some South Asian female characters in her short story collection

Unaccustomed Earth to show how they deconstruct their identities to fulfill the contradictory demands placed on them by their home and host cultures.

In her essay "Postmodernism and Feminism?", Patricia Waugh expresses her skepticism about postmodernism's total abandonment of the "Enlightenment project" by noting that it might have an adverse effect on the political agenda of feminism (344). However, she observers that feminism has always contributed "its own critique of the Enlightenment, arguing that the notion of a universal rational Subject is implicitly masculine… "(ibid). She further argues that the Enlightenment's construction of "a public/private split" consigned women to "the 'private' realm of embodiment and domesticity… " (347). She also maintains that feminist debates on identity and the recognition of differences among women across the world dismantle the idea of a universal woman. This dismantling resonates with "the radical uncertainty of postmodernism" (ibid). Nevertheless, she poses the question of the possibility of preserving the political project of feminism in case of its acceptance of postmodernism's rejection of the "epistemological foundations" of the Enlightenment (ibid).

Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson propose a sort of mediation to calibrate the breach mentioned by Waugh between feminism and postmodernism in the following words:

> … if postmodern-feminist critique must remain theoretical, not just any kind of theory will do. Rather, theory here would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods. (34)

The inclusion of historicity and cultural specificity enables postmodern-feminist critique to continue its political practice. As Waugh puts it: "[a]s a political practice, surely feminism must continue to posit some belief in the notion of effective human agency, the necessity for historical continuity in formulating identity and a belief in some kind of historical progress" (347). Therefore, theorists like Waugh, Fraser, and Nicholson conclude that if female identity formation is to be explained through postmodernism, then postmodernism has to be attuned to history and culture to some extent. In other words, postmodern feminism has to recognize the grand narratives of history and culture to some extent to develop a theory of identity formation.

Ruma, the protagonist of the title story, is an appropriate subject to be studied through a postmodern-feminist approach. Her seemingly contradictory demeanors point to the fact that there is a deep postmodern aspect of her identity. However, when observed in the context of the

agency of her subjectivity, her behavior makes perfect sense because it appears attuned to her historical and cultural contingency. Whereas a part of Ruma's identity is clearly westernized, the other part clings to the practices of her mother, who persistently maintained her Indian identity in the form of the traditional dresses she wore and the food she cooked. Ruma left her job as a paralegal to start a family, accepting the traditional role of a homemaker. Another thing that intrigues her and that does not conform to the American way of thinking is her guilty conscience over not offering her father a place at her house is something Adam, her American husband fails to understand. Also, her father, on his visit to their house, tells her continually to be conscious about her hard-earned career. She, however, does not seem to be concerned at all over that issue. Instead, she starts depending on the little help offered by her father, and grieves over the fact that he will not stay with her, although the possibility that he might want to stay on had given her much uneasiness at first. It is also noteworthy that Ruma has always been the more responsible sibling; since her brother seemed completely westernized in his dealings with their parents, and maintained only an occasional connection with them over the phone. Her father, during his stay in her house, is reminded of his own wife, sensing the resemblance between the mother and the daughter "Like his wife, Ruma was now alone in this new place, overwhelmed, without friends, caring for a young child,…(Lahiri 40).

Though there are resemblances, Ruma is obviously different from her mother in many ways. Lahiri, using Ruma's father as the focalizer, informs readers that even in school, she had worked as a busgirl at a local restaurant in the summer. Now in Seattle, and married to an American, unlike her mother she does not feel like cooking Indian food; rather, she indulges her son Akash to consume typical American food from boxes. She knows that "Bengali had never been a language in which she felt like an adult" (Lahiri 12). Unlike her mother, she is also not much interested in decorating the house, as is shown in her lack of enthusiasm in the gardening of her father. Neither does she crave for the company of either Indian or American friends. Towards the end of the story, her posting of the letter to Mrs. Bagchi proves that she has started to respect personal space and freedom like Americans and is able to treat her father as an individual. Soon, she is prepared to accept her father's falling in love with another woman with indifference.

The contrasting parts of Ruma's identity invoke postmodern fragmentation of self along with the feminist idea of cultural specificity. In her identity, both her American present and the

Indian past she has received from her mother are evident. However, as Brittany Kemper observes, she fails to decide what is more acceptable to her. "She cannot mediate between the Indian traditions of her mother's nostalgia and the acceptance of traditionally Americanized customs in her father. With both parents representing the oppositions on Ruma's diasporic spectrum, she does not know where to fall in between" (Kemper 20).

Thus, Ruma's identity conundrum culminates in a split self. She embodies an amalgamation of what Waugh characterizes as "weak postmodernism" and feminism (356). Waugh believes that such postmodernism is a sort of "reconstructive postmodernism" because it "never entirely abandons the importance of agency, of the need to experience the self as a coherent and consistent, if revisable entity,…"(ibid). Ruma's identity, seen in the context of her past, proves to be coherent and consistent. Her inability to fully assimilate with either her American present or Indian past creates instability. Therefore, her identity proves to be strongly revisable, hence contradictory. Her father, a first-generation immigrant, has become more Americanized than Ruma in his old age, just like her brother. Therefore, it is Ruma who turns out to be dealing with a struggling identity; consequently, she symbolizes an appropriate postmodern-feminist subject.

A careful inspection of another character of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Sangeeta Biswas from "Nobody's Business," shows similar contradictions that mark her out as a postmodern-feminist subject. Sangeeta wants to be introduced as Sang. Like the shortened form of the name, she has truncated almost everything that connects her to her root, India. A number of Indian men, successful expatriates, make numerous phone calls to her to ask for her hand. Some of them are old acquaintances of her childhood. However, Sang refuses them all because she believes that they are not proposing to her because of love; they are doing so just for an arranged marriage. She also terms these calls violation of her privacy. In her lifestyle, Sang is thoroughly Westernized. Sharing a house with two American students, one male, and the other one female, she remains busy with her job at a bookstore and with her Egyptian boy friend Farouk, or "Freddy". They see each other frequently, and sleep together three/four days a week. This relationship is the only thing about which she seems to be consistent. She has casually divulged to her housemates about her dropping out of Harvard, and she had let her other qualities, like years of training in bharat natyam, perfect SATs and high exam scores, culminate into nothing without feeling any remorse for abandoning them.

The only thing she is serious about is the complete faithfulness she maintains towards her partner. This devotion, that leads her to the downright rejection of other men, is jokingly compared to the weaving of Penelope by her housemate Paul, whose attraction for Sang is also overlooked by her for the same reason. Charles, her friend, reveals another feature of Sang's character when he comments about Farouk, 'So he's a little old-fashioned. That's one of the things you like about him, right? (Lahiri 179) Despite her western lifestyle, there is something traditional in Sang. In fact, she sometimes behaves like a protective, almost motherly wife of Farouk by doing his shopping, cooking, and laundry. She also checks his articles for typos, and keeps track of his doctor's appointments. She even scans suitable houses for him so that he can shortlist them, not without a dream of getting married and settling down with him in a house one day. In spite of Farouk's callousness in not driving her home, or not letting her stay at his place for the whole night, she remains keen on keeping up the relationship intact. At the end, when she is compelled to break it up after getting solid proofs of Farouk's involvement with other girls, she behaves hysterically. She never recuperates, and loses her mind completely; then goes to live with her sister in London.

The two extremes of Sang's life, the complete distance from her Indian past and the American present on the one hand, and utter commitment towards Farouk on the other hand, reveals the fragmentation of her identity. The fact that she is noncommittal to most aspects of life, gives her the freedom to move freely in and out different cultures and locality. Kemper defines it as "a shift in modern diaspora" (30). She further observes:

> Sang always appears comfortable, whether talking on the phone in her American home, speaking Bengali to her nephew, or visiting her sister in London. Sang is able to transcend some of her diasporic troubles because of her natural ability to fit in dialogically with the community surrounding her. (30)

Sang's detachment from most aspects of life gives her a sense of fluidity and a power to connect with people without her having to carry any emotional baggage. She seems to know that none of the connections are deep-seated. In contrast, her unconditional commitment to Farouk reveals the starkly opposite side of her otherwise nonchalant disposition. A character like Sang is not easy to categorize. Therefore, the best way to read her identity is to see it through a postmodern-feminist

approach. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson's words can be aptly inserted here to clarify why Sang's character cannot be categorized easily. These theoreticians maintain:

> In general, postmodern-feminist theory would be pragmatic and fallibilistic. It would tailor its methods and categories to the specific task at hand, using multiple categories when appropriate and forswearing the metaphysical comfort of a single feminist method or feminist epistemology. In short, this theory would look more like a tapestry composed of threads of many different hues than one woven in a single color. (35)

To have the freedom of adhering to multiple strands of thoughts, and at the same time, to be able to accommodate more than one identity, is plausible in postmodern-feminist contexts. This is because a woman in the postmodern world is not tied to a fixed role; rather, she has a fluid personality. This fluidity is the marker of the postmodern-feminist aspects of Sang's identity in the story "Nobody's Business."

Sudha from "Only Goodness" is the last character to be studied in the second section of Chapter Five. Unlike Ruma and Sang, she seems more capable of anchoring her identity as the narrative progresses. In fact, the Sudha Jhumpa Lahiri depicts at the beginning of the text learns a lot about life and about her own place in the world during the course of the narration. Therefore, unlike the preceding two characters, Sudha surmounts the contradictions in her to collate the duality of her identity into a coherent form at a certain point of her life.

The elder of two siblings, Sudha, in Lahiri's narrative, 'had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before then she had lived according to their expectations,…' (Lahiri 129). Sudha's obedience towards the parents is important for the ensuing contrasting picture that the story portrays between Sudha and her younger brother Rahul. The divergences between them can be seen in perspective through Dominique Nagpal's perspective where he observes that first-borns in immigrant families are usually

> subdued by a larger, more complex conglomerate of pressures, compared to their siblings, while they (the younger siblings) are already able to draw from the experiences the family gained as a whole. The adjustment and assimilation processes are smoother

and other learning curves are better established by the time the second child arrives" (qtd. in Bran 262-263).

Sudha and Rahul form contrasting figures in every possible way. Nagpal's words are appropriate for Sudha because she is the one who performs the role of a responsible daughter and big sister in the family's jagged attempts at assimilation in diasporic space. In contrast, the younger sibling Rahul, in Bran's opinion, "can hardly comprehend the immigrant experience and minimizes the hardships that come along with it…"(265).

Whereas Sudha views her parents' agony caused by their separation from their homeland as similar to an incurable disease, to Rahul it is nothing but a selfish pursuit of happiness on their part. The different approaches of the two siblings towards their parents' migrant experience are aptly expressed in Lahiri's words thus:

> While Sudha regarded her parents' separation from India as an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer, Rahul was impermeable to that aspect of their life as well. "No one dragged them here," he would say. "Baba left India to get rich, and ma married him because she had nothing else to do." (138)

The rift between Sudha and Rahul, apparent in these words, only gets wider over the years. Though it is Sudha who first introduced Rahul to alcohol, buying and hiding the bottles herself, it is Rahul who becomes totally addicted to it. Sudha always remains careful about maintaining secrecy (from their parents) about her drinking, and is not an alcoholic. We see her play the role of the guardian of the family, always trying to reason with Rahul, and comforting her parents. She tries to give her parents as much time as possible during her vacation. She also goes to London for higher studies. It is also the city where her parents had lived for the first time outside India. She also makes them happy by taking them with her to London on a visit.

Her role of the traditional, responsible Indian daughter, however, eventually comes to an end, as at one point she vehemently protests her parents' placing demand on her that she try to talk sense into Rahul in this way "I can't talk to him anymore. I can't fix him. I can't keep fixing what's wrong with this family" (156). She marries the Englishman Roger and goes away from her parents to live in England. She tells the parents to admit the fact of Rahul's drinking in order

to persuade him to end his addiction. These attitudes, however practical, are overcome by the fact that during her own pregnancy she consistently thinks about Rahul.

At the end, after Rahul's disastrous babysitting of Sudha and Roger's son Neel, she drives him away only to realize that all relationships are variable and all families vulnerable to cracks that may prove to be too wide to be repaired. Sudha's ability to rebuild herself from broken pieces of relationship enables her to balance families (her parents' and her own) and continents (the United States and the United Kingdom). Her ability to let people come in and out of her life keeps her going and permits her to find happiness and fulfillment.

The duality of Sudha's character, apparent in the preceding paragraphs, makes her in many ways a postmodern-feminist. She defies categories in her various approaches to life. She is a responsible yet self-conscious daughter. She does not sacrifice her own pursuits to stick around her parents. From the birth of her six-year younger brother Rahul, she has been performing the part of a doting and adoring elder sister, taking part in his upbringing "determined that her little brother should leave his mark as a child in America" (Lahiri 136). However, when the brother fails utterly in life, she does not hesitate to deny him. Sudha's skills of adaptation and mutability also help to make her a pluralistic subject. Jane Flax's argument can be aptly related to Sudha's identity in this context. In her explanation of the changing contours of feminism in the light of postmodernism, Flax observes:

> Contemporary feminist movements are in part rooted in transformations in social experience that challenge widely shared categories of social meaning and explanation. In the United States, such transformations include changes in the structure of the economy, the family, the place of the United States in the world system, the declining authority of previously powerful social institutions,…. (44)

Though the above words, Flax notes that contemporary feminist subjects perform differently in their social roles and challenge previously accepted or agreed upon categories of social meaning. She opines that economic and family structures are also being remolded for the transformation of female roles in and outside the family. Sudha's role in the family is diversified. She is a good and responsible daughter. However, she is not willing to sacrifice individual happiness for the sake of duty.

As a postmodern-feminist subject, Sudha experiences changes that have occurred in society. As a postmodern flexible subject, she transforms herself to accommodate the changing structure of the family. Flax has observed that feminist theory depends on and reflects a certain set of social experience. She believes that many feminist writers are now vexed by questions concerning the acceptable form of feminism in the wake of social transformations and movements. She observes that the changing roles of women in new social situations are akin to the postmodern theory of the instability of the self. Since characters like Sudha reinscribe their identities according to changing social and familial structures, they can be said to reflect postmodern traits. Therefore, their struggling identity and liminal existence can be studied in the context of postmodern-feminist discourse. Since postmodern subjects are flexible and fragmented, Sudha, with her changing roles and mutable disposition, can be aptly called a representative of the postmodern idea of self.

To sum up, the three characters studied in this section of Chapter Five transcend watertight theoretical definitions and demand a pluralistic, multi-faceted approach that is diverse enough to contain their complicated personality traits. An approach to them can be found in strands of postmodern-feminist theory, which, in Fraser and Nicholson's words, "…would be nonuniversalist. When its focus became cross-cultural or transepochal, its mode of attention would be comparativist rather than universalizing, attuned to changes and contrasts instead of covering laws" (34). In short, the postmodern-feminist characters under discussion have identities that are crammed with changes and contrasts and symmetrical to the changing social and diasporic space they occupy.

(iii) Reading a Few Characters Transnationally:

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze, and Guattari show how migrants and nomads are divergent in the sense that whereas the points along the trajectory are important for migrants, nomads consider points as "relays along a trajectory" (380). Destination is important for migrants but nomads prioritize journeying. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "reterritorialization" is the ultimate vision for a migrant but nomads "can be called the [d]eterritorialized par excellence,…" (380-1). In a feminist reading of this definition of nomads' Rosi Braidotti compares women with nomads by stating that nomadism is a "vertiginous progression toward deconstructing identity; molecularization of the self" (45). Braidotti also

notes that for women nomadism is "not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing" (66). Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru builds her own argument on Braidotti's observation in the essay "From the Subaltern to the Female Nomad in Narratives of Transnational Migration by Jhumpa Lahiri and Monica Ali." In explicating Braidotti's observation Alexandru speculates thus: nomadism "… is a category of the self that, in Braidotti's view, applies primarily to women, endows them with a freedom of will and action never granted them by tradition and overcomes their different forms of marginality" (n.pag.). Nomadic deterritorialization of the self can be associated with other concepts such as "unhomeliness" and "hybridity".

In his seminal book *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha notes that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity" (5). Bhabha speculates hybridity as a site where the stability of fixed identities is questioned. He associates the idea of "unhomeliness" with this destabilized identity that makes it impossible for the diasporic subject to resemble his/her old self (13). For Bhabha, unhomeliness is "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (ibid). Similarly, the idea of hybridity is often associated with the discourse of diaspora. Joel Kuortti notes that diasporic discourse encompasses issues related to "transnational globalization" such as "borders, migration, "illegal" immigration, repatriation, exile, refugees" (*Writing Imagined Diasporas: South Asian Women Reshaping North American Identity* 3). He further contends that diaspora "signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity: of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, times" (ibid). In this sense, both diasporic discourse and the idea of hybridity are connected to crossing borders and straddling cultures.

The last section of Chapter Five studies the questions of borders and migration, along with cultural, linguistic, historical and spatial diversities in relation to diasporic female identity formation. The guiding principles for the discussion are nomadism and hybridity, as illustrated in the preceding paragraphs. It is important to note that Jhumpa Lahiri's female characters, who work as translators of two cultures in the diasporic space of the United States, are studied in this section to decipher the idiosyncrasies of their identity constructions. The writer's own experiences of straddling two cultures shed light on the way her characters negotiate their identity in a symmetrical ambience. Talking about her dual identity in the newspaper article "My Two Lives" Lahiri states:

> When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another. (n.pag.)

However, as she grew up she overcame the shuttling between two identities by learning to accommodate both of them without much consternation. She expresses this situation in the following words:

> As I approach middle age, one plus one equals two, both in my work and in my daily existence. The traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day. But like siblings they are intimately familiar with one another, forgiving and intertwined. (ibid)

Such a disposition, reached after years of struggle, is the essence of a diasporic sensibility that seeps into a number of characters of Lahiri's works, including *Unaccustomed Earth*.

Many female characters of *Unaccustomed Earth,* mostly from the second generation, prove to be successful translators of cultures. Their successes do not resemble Ashima's negotiation with her diasporic identity in *The Namesake*. On the other hand, some women migrants of *Unaccustomed Earth*, from both first and second generations, exhibit emotional maturity and find stability in their diasporic existence by overcoming psychological turmoil concerning their dual identities. Negotiation, instead of bringing a constant uneasiness, seems to be a freeing experience for them and often leads them to better things in life. Another significant feature of *Unaccustomed Earth* is that the diasporic experience of the female characters of this book often involves more than two continents and creates a sense of fluidity and hybridity in the

identity formation of the characters. Instead of tossing and turning between two cultures, migrant lives in *Unaccustomed Earth* seem to be flowing freely among and across several cultures to make the characters feel at home everywhere and nowhere at the same time. This last section of Chapter Five discusses the female characters from *Unaccustomed Earth* who emerge as "everywhere and nowhere" persons in their diasporic trajectories.

The title story of *Unaccustomed Earth* portrays the character of Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi who immigrated to the USA by herself, completed a doctorate in statistics, and became a lecturer at an American university for about 30 years. In her Master's thesis "Indian American Identity Career, Family and Home in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*" Hanna Oltedal comments : "Mrs. Bagchi's example seems to indicate that if a Bengali first-generation woman joins the work force she will naturally integrate into society and abandon many of the traditional Indian customs, such as dressing in saris" (42). Mrs. Bagchi's integration seems to amount to a willful arrangement achieved with the view of attaining a personal sense of accomplishment. Her mutation does not involve the agonizing process of acculturation; rather; it exhibits her openness to new experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that she enthusiastically explores other continents of the world without getting involved with any particular place.

True to her nature, Mrs. Bagchi maintains few ties with her Indian family and concedes to only a restricted and conditional relationship with the protagonist of the story, Ruma's father. Diasporic characters like Meenakshi Bagchi occupy a precarious place in nationalistic logic, as adumbrated by Gayatri Gopinath. Gopinath illustrates the concept of "nationalistic logic" by arguing that "…within a nationalistic logic where women embody the past and that past is figured as heterosexual, the non-heterosexual female, in particular, is multiply excluded from the terms of national belonging and "good citizenship" " (264). Therefore, in the otherwise heterosexual diasporic society of South Asians, the single Mrs. Bagchi is a misfit. However, she seems to be enjoying her life as it is because her demeanor points towards the fact that she takes pleasure in her solitude and liberation. Her baggage-free life symbolizes her spiritual nomadism[6].

[6] Rosi Braidotti notes that for women nomadism is "not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing…(66)." Therefore, for a character like Mrs. Bagchi, boundaries are flexible as she believes in constant crossing over, not in settling down to a fixed territory.

The narrator of the second story "Hell-Heaven" is Usha, a second generation Indian-American who is brought up in a way that has semblances with Lahiri's own childhood. In the story, the older Usha reflects on her younger self by analyzing the different phases of her identity construction. As she grows up in America, Usha faced conflicting demands from her home culture oriented mother and the host culture of mainstream American life. Usha is in love with the host culture and this love is manifested in her relationship with Deborah, the American fiancée of Pranab Kaku, a friend of Usha's parents. The young Usha not only loves Deborah's company and gifts, but also feels connected to her at a deeper level than anythone else in the world. "We exchanged what I believed were secret smiles, and in those moments I felt that she understood me better than anyone else in the world" (Lahiri 70). Usha's initial failure to translate her home culture makes her overtly assimilated into the host culture and culminates in the complete estrangement between mother and daughter. The secret life of Usha is full of rebellious actions that the mother would never approve of. She prefers English to Bengali and relishes American food instead of her mother's cooking. She feels awkward in Indian dresses and feels comfortable in jeans. She leads the typical life of an American teenager by partying and drinking and mixing with boys but always hides these things from her mother. Her life, to a certain point, seems fully Americanized and free from the diasporic duality of her childhood.

However, as Usha grows up, her connection with Deborah wanes. She rekindles her ties with her mother who has been considered as a symbol of moribund Indianness by the daughter for a long time now. The mediation with dual cultures forms a parallel development in this story because like her daughter Aparna (Usha's mother), too learns to accept that Usha "was not only her daughter but a child of America as well" (Lahiri 82). Aparna led a desolate life after being emotionally abandoned by both her husband and daughter but her condition improves towards the end of the story as both persons revise their bonding with her. She even decides that "when she turned fifty, [she would] get a degree in library science at a nearby university" (Lahiri 82). The reversals in the characters of mother and daughter exemplify their realization that openness to both cultures would bring a sense of serenity in a diasporic life. Therefore, after passing through a long phase of mutation, the mother and daughter become each other's solace and soul mates in difficult times. Their negotiation with identity is more a liberating; than an agonizing

process. They refuse the idea to "re-essentialise locality" in favor of utilizing and responding to "diverse and specific ideas of 'the local'" (Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 3). The unlikely revision of identities in Aparna and Usha is not unlikely, as Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle argue, "[i]dentity is a multi-faceted and often contradictory process, situationally deployed" (3-4). The particular situation of the mother and daughter's life prompts them to negotiations with diverse and specific ideas of the local and result in successful translation of binary cultures for them.

Sudha from the story "Only Goodness," another character depicted by Lahiri, displays a kind of diasporic sensibility that is one-step ahead of Aparna and Usha's disposition. She embodies what Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle term as "transmigrant identity" that contains "a range of shifting and contextual affiliations to place due to regular cross-border mobility" (2). This transmigrant identity is often concerned, in M. Kearney's opinion, with "the deterritorialisation of identity, and a 'multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating sub-spaces'" (qtd. in Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 2). Sudha's identity is deterritorialised, as she occupies a multidimensional global space with intermingling sub-spaces.

Born in London, Sudha came to the United States at the age of four, only to return there after her graduation at Wayland to do a second master's at the London School of Economics. Lahiri describes Sudha's effortless blending in England in the following words:

> Before leaving she had applied for her British passport, a document her parents had not obtained for her when she was born, and when she presented it at Heathrow the immigration officer welcomed her home….Perhaps because it was her birthplace, she felt an instinctive connection to London, a sense of belonging though she barely knew her way around. (144)

Her subsequent marriage with the Englishman Roger Featherstone is also very significant because, like her, he is also a deterritorialised subject, having being born in India and spending his life's first three years in Bombay.

The life Sudha left at Wayland before moving to England had been an example of successful mediation. She had balanced her Indian-American identity by being a responsible

daughter and by achieving academic success, while assimilating to mainstream American life at college. Her final movement to London also brings her a position "as a project manager for an organization" that promoted micro loans in poor countries (Lahiri 151). The prestigious job, marriage, and becoming the mother of the baby boy Neel, make her feel that her life is at the same time demanding and also gratifying. Sudha's navigation among and through different spaces, cultures, and identities makes her a world citizen, and at the same time gives her a sense of belonging to everywhere and nowhere.

Sudha's transcendence beyond a fixed identity prompts her to name her son Neel (pronounced Neil), which sounds both Indian and British or even American. Thus Sudha, a second generation character who successfully negotiates her identity as an Indian American, "…supplies her third generation son with a name that will enable him to transcend the sense of otherness that she shares with the second generation characters in Lahiri's stories" (Oltedal 105). Like Sudha, her son is also going to be a part of three different continents, Asia, Europe, and America− instead of being confined to a permanent identity dependent on only one culture.

Sang is a character from the previously discussed story "Nobody's Business" who has only superficial connections to any fixed place or culture. The story's name is indicative of the lack/failure of communication among its characters. Although Sang is an Indian-American like Sudha, unlike her, she (Sang) maintains minimum communication with her parents. She is also different from Sudha in the sense that she is never seen to accept family responsibility the way Sudha does. She talks to her parents in Michigan on weekends. Apart from these phone calls, no other interaction is mentioned to have taken place among them. She seems to have a better bonding with her elder sister in London and her boyfriend is from Cairo, Egypt. It is ironical that instead of becoming intimate with people who are physically and geographically close to her, she bonds with people from other continents easily. She often turns down marriage proposals from expatriate Indians and keeps a measured distance from her housemates.

The sheer detachment of Sang from her surrounding gives her a nomadic kind of existence. When she moves to Paul and Heather's flat as the third tenant, Paul observes, "[s]he had practically nothing to contribute to the house, no pots or appliances, nothing for the kitchen apart from an ailing hanging plant that shed yellow heart-shaped leaves"(Lahiri 179). He notices as well that all Sang possesses are "…a futon, two big battered suitcases, a series of shopping bags, and a few boxes…"(ibid). After being cheated by Farouk she leaves for London and her

friend Charles empties her room within a short time. This kind of living indicates that Sang never strikes deep roots anywhere. Although she is perfectly Americanized, her whole-hearted devotion to Farouk and plan of settling down with him go with her Indian culture. Yet her connection with London and ultimate move to the city demonstrate the multiplicity, or deterritorialisation of her identity.

About Sang's navigation among multiple cultures, Brittany Kemper comments that Sang "…always appears comfortable, whether talking on the phone in her American home, speaking Bengali to her nephew, or visiting her sister in London" (30). She observes that Sang is able to transcend some of her diasporic troubles and "seems to reveal a shift in modern diasporas" (ibid). By this "shift" she means the transnational movement of diasporic subjects. This fluidity of navigating among and through space and culture gives Sudha and Sang the status of "global travelers", to use Natalie Friedman's words. Her observation of such travelers aptly fits both these characters:

> Lahiri's depictions of the elite class of Western-educated Indians and their children's relationship to both India and America dismantle the stereotype of brown-skinned immigrant families that are always outsiders to American culture and recast them as cosmopolites, members of a shifting network of global travelers whose national loyalties are flexible. (112)

Therefore, characters like Sang and Sudha construct their diasporic identity on a flexible note by expressing less rigidity about fixed national loyalties.

Lahiri's depictions of the diasporic women of *Unaccustomed Earth* is brilliantly divergent, based as they are on the age, education, profession, and various perspectives of the characters. Parul, Kaushik's mother from the "Hema and Kaushik" part of *Unaccustomed Earth* is a remarkable creation and is a unique representation of a diasporic figure from the first generation Indian migrants to the United States. Unlike any other character of *Unaccustomed Earth,* Parul chooses to migrate again to America after living in Bombay for seven years. Lahiri also depicts Parul's life at Cambridge before the family's departure for India in 1974. In fact, Lahiri also describes Parul's affluent, Anglophile childhood in an aristocratic part of Calcutta. The multi-hued identity of Parul comes alive through Lahiri's lucid description. Parul lives an

ordinary life like other immigrant wives of Indian scholars during the first part of her diasporic life. However, she stands apart in a photograph from that time that Hema finds in her home and looks at after seven years. Hema discerns that Parul is more beautiful and neater than her own mother is, a notion that gets even stronger in her when she meets her after Parul's family members come to Hema's house to stay for a few days.

The Parul that returns from India on her second diasporic journey appears to be more Americanized than her previous self. "Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge had," said Hema's mother (Lahiri 235). Hema remembers her mother's criticism of Parul in the following way:

> "There were remarks concerning your (Kaushik's) mother's short hair, her slacks, the Johnnie Walker she and your father continued to drink…" (ibid).

In addition, she smokes, almost always speaks in English, and shows little enthusiasm for household work. Her lavish ways of shopping and eating out also indicate a kind of self-indulgence, rare in the middle-class Indian immigrant community. Her choice of a house is also different from others. As Hema introspects referring to Kaushik, "[u]nlike my parents, yours had opinions about design, preferring something contemporary…They sought an in-ground pool, or space to build one; your mother missed swimming at her club in Bombay" (Lahiri 244). It is interesting to note that Parul is overenthusiastic about Rome where they took a two-day layover on their way to America from India to tour the city. Hema recalls:

> Your mother described the fountains, and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel you had stood three hours in line to see. "So many lovely churches," she said. "Each is like a museum. It made me want to be a Catholic, only to be able to pray in them."(233)

Parul's obsession with Roman culture reveals that she is open to multiple cultures. She takes in new cultures with ease and poise, and even with delight. Vijay Agnew comments on this sort of acculturation: "[i]mmigration requires the crossing of frontiers –physical and metaphorical, visible and invisible, known and unknown–and the line that is drawn is fluid and unstable" (44). From her multiple diasporic journeys, Parul has crossed numerous frontiers, whether physical or metaphorical. The fluid and unstable line between her multiple selves allow her to straddle cultures without remonstration.

This particular trait of her character is evident in her celebration of Christmas at Bombay. Kaushik remembers his mother's Christmas celebration in India, "stringing lights throughout

[the] flat and putting presents under a potted hibiscus" (Lahiri 265). She also regrets the fact that the holiday was not the same "without the cold weather, the decorated shops, the cards that came in the mail" (ibid). Thus, Parul's Indian and American identities overlap to produce the hybridization of Christmas celebration with a potted hibiscus in the geographical space of India. In other words, the porosity of the line dividing her multiple identities permits the free flow and coexistence of compound cultures.

Hema, one of the protagonists of "Hema and Kaushik," is the last character to be discussed in Chapter Five. Regarding Hema's identity, the most crucial point that one may note is the malleable nature of culture itself. Since her childhood, parents who cling to their native culture and allowed the least infiltration of American culture had brought up Hema. Accordingly, she assumed the role of a compliant daughter and carefully hid her Americanized self from her parents. However, the decision to marry Navin instead of remaining the secret lover of the married Julian, highlights the trace of Indian tradition in her identity. On the other hand, her tradition-bound mother does not hesitate to ask Hema if she liked girls after seeing her indifference to men. The two women show how their root culture has been mutated in the course of their diasporic trajectory. In her book *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter,* Susan S. Friedman defines culture as flexible by noting: "[i]nstead, I assume a "culture" to be historically produced, ever-changing, and always reactively and syncretistically formed (and reformed) in relation to other cultures" (134). Friedman calls this changing nature of culture the "syncretist borderlands of cultural exchange, intermingling, and mutual influence" (135). Such exchanges are what Hema and her mother seem to have experienced by accommodating dual cultures in their identities.

This mutual influence of multiple cultures strongly draws Hema to the study of Latin, a third language. She feels equally drawn to the Etruscans, people "who had possibly wandered from Asia Minor to central Italy and flourished for four centuries,…" (Lahiri 300). In fact, Hema's obsession with Italy is reminiscent of Parul's fascination for the same country. During their fleeting affair in Italy, both Hema and Kaushik feel at home in Italy, enjoying every place they visit. In the last week of her stay in Italy, Hema visits Volterra with Kaushik. The town has an austere, forbidding, and solitary mood where "they, too, felt fortified, tranquil, much like the town" (Lahiri 319).

Thus Hema's openness to multiple cultures validates Alexandru's argument that "[f]or a few decades, migration has been a central conceptual category in a postcolonial world increasingly marked by globalization, which involves, more than anything else, a fluidization of all – geographical, political, cultural, ethnic, psychological…"(n.pag). Hema, like Mrs. Bagchi and Parul, crosses borders with euphoria rather than nostalgia. Their diasporic identity makes them female nomads of transnational migration patterns.

A study of Jhumpa Lahiri's female characters from the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* leads one to conclude that the identity construction of the women as postcolonial, postmodern, hybridized, and nomadic diasporic subjects is one of her major themes. Since Lahiri depicts her female characters as complicated, nonlinear, and intricate, a monolithic analysis of them seems inadequate. Therefore, the multiple lenses that I have used to study them focus on the diversity each character contains in her.

Chapter Six

Reifying Identity Formation on Screen: A Study of Two South Asian Diasporic Films

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This dissertation's foremost concern is the shifting identity of a few diasporic South Asian woman characters in fiction by three diasporic Indian writers. Therefore, the previous chapters had analyzed literary texts dealing with the diasporic life of some South Asian female characters. However, I will now analyze two diasporic films to extend the scope of the central argument. My analysis will focus on the mutation of two female characters occupying important roles as diasporic subjects in these films. The first film I will focus on is an adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2007), directed by Mira Nair, and the next *English Vinglish* (2012), directed by Gauri Shinde.

Films have been repeatedly considered as a popular cultural form that can also play the role of identity markers. Apart from being cultural forms, they have immense financial potential. Jigna Desai believes that South Asian diasporic films occupy a very significant place as economic, political, and cultural tools mediating between global capitalism and the postcolonial nation-state.She places diasporic films at a pivotal position by retaining that "South Asian diasporic identificatory processes are centrally configured and contested through the cinematic apparatus" (33). In the same breath, she also upholds the signifying qualities of films by noting:

> Thus, South Asian diasporic films function significantly as part of the shifting economic, political, and cultural relations between global capitalism and the postcolonial nation-state, raising questions regarding the negotiation of cultural politics of diasporas located within local, national, and transnational processes. (34)

Thus Desai considers South Asian diasporic films as agents shaping the cultural identity of migrants by posing questions regarding cultural politics within local, national, and transnational processes. Films are relevant texts in the context of the present dissertation in that, like the literary texts discussed so far, the ones studied in this chapter also map the trajectories of diasporic women in their search for identity. In their journey they struggle with internal conflicts between tradition and modernity, as well as with external repressive forces such as cultural and patriarchal values that tend to be directly/indirectly clamped down on them. The next few

paragraphs sum up the customary presentation of women in films and the cultural logic that contributes to it. Since the dissertation's main purpose is to develop a feminist approach to reading diasporic women's emancipation through postcolonial and postmodern feminist lenses, this chapter concentrates on a postcolonial feminist critique of diaspora films. However, extended references to postmodern feminism has not been included in the theoretical framework because of its lack of relevance to the basic argument being developed here.

Since this dissertation's locus is postcolonial and postmodern feminism, the present chapter adopts a feminist perspective. The films to be studied depict female emancipation within a patriarchal social structure. Both films portray two major female characters who undergo identity shifts in adapting to new circumstances. The filmic portrayals of these female characters are soaked in the values of a generally patriarchal society. Therefore, it is relevant to study their mutation through feminist lens.

In a dissertation devoted to study the negotiation and adaptability of South Asian migrant women in North America, it is vital to analyze how the question of female emancipation has been treated by film critics over time. For this reason, a brief theoretical study of feminist film critics is relevant as developed here. Western feminist film critics like Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Janet Bergstrom, Mary Ann Doane, Carol Clover and others have contributed to the discourse of patriarchal value-biased female representation in cinemas. Some of them use psychoanalytical theories in their feminist argument of film criticism, while others use gay, lesbian or race theories. Many South Asian critics' works also have relevance to the issue. Since one of the movies discussed in this chapter is a Bollywood production, it is logical in the discussion to refer to critics both from the East as well as the West who study filmic portrayal of women through feminist lens. Since the theoretical framework of the content analysis method of the present discussion hovers around feminist critiques of female representations in mainstream films, it should be stressed here that whereas most of the discussion about the representation of women on screen highlights the objectification of female bodies as sexual objects, the present project engages itself with the patriarchal representation of women as socially inferior beings. As the analysis focuses more on the social and moral empowerment of women, particular attention is given to their representation as dependents, or persons lacking individuality.

In feminist film criticism, Laura Mulvey's ground breaking essay deploys psychoanalytic theory to study films through the idea of "scopophilia". Mulvey explicates the term thus "…Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point, he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 7). As a feminist film critic, Mulvey finds a close resemblance between scopophilia and the representation of women in mainstream Hollywood cinema. She observes that the active/ passive binary exists in male and female roles on screen in the sense that in most popular films, the pleasure that consists in looking "has been split between active/male and passive/female" (9). She implies that whereas the active male gaze determines the portrayal of the female form in films, the passive exhibitionist role of women "can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (ibid). Mulvey's phrase "to-be-looked-at-ness", summarizes the utterly passive way of representing women in mainstream Hollywood movies. The two movies discussed in this chapter narrate the stories of two women who dwell in patriarchal societies and are seen through traditionally patriarchal value systems. The way these women mutate themselves within this mould, the level of empowerment they achieve, and their development within the existing social structure are the main subjects of analysis here. Therefore, as the relevant films portray two South Asian diasporic women, the next section links Laura Mulvey's theory of female passivity in western movies with feminist film theories belonging to the eastern part of the world.

In her discussion on representation of women in Bollywood films, Bindu Nair shows that these films can be studied within the framework of the "male gaze" coined by Mulvey. She points out how most of the women characters exist in relation to the male leads of the films. In her work on the deconstruction of gender roles in Hindi cinemas leading to the empowerment of women, Nudrat Raza discusses the sexual objectification of female characters in some commercially successful Bollywood films. She quotes Nair in support of her view. Nair's words apply equally to the argument of the present project in the sense that she not only notes the fetishizing of female bodies as sexual objects, but also brings forward their socially dependent position as portrayed in Hindi films. According to Nair, the plots of Hindi movies revolve around issues such as men's desires, dreams, and predicaments. It is always the male protagonist's story that films develop. On the other hand, "women in Bollywood movies exist only in relation to men as either their wives, mothers or lovers, and are rarely portrayed as independent beings, who

make their own decisions, are working women or, question authority" (qtd. in Raza 29). Nair deplores the lack of female subjectivity in Bollywood films and the absence of strong woman characters in themas well as the stereotypical portrayal of women. Nair's observation can be compared to Mulvey's evaluation of Hollywood movies where too women are depicted as passive beings as if on celluloid display.

The Namesake (2007) directed by Mira Nair, and *English Vinglish* (2012) directed by Gauri Shinde, are studied in this chapter through the lens of postcolonial and diasporic feminism. Although *The Namesake* is essentially the story of Gogol Ganguli, here the text of the film is seen as a chronicle of the unfolding of the character of Ashima Ganguli, his mother. As for *English Vinglish*, the brief diasporic life of Shashi Godbole, the central character, is construed to trace the length she has traversed towards her emancipation as an individual entity. Before initiating the study of these two characters it is important to locate them as the focalizers of the films because it is their perspectives that is used in the films to guide the viewers. In this regard Monika Fludernik's idea of focalization has been utilized as discussed in the following section.

In her ground-breaking book *An Introduction to Narratology* Monika Fludernik observes that "iconic signs" are used in films to reflect and reproduce gestures in the real world. She explains "iconic signs" as a system where "the sign (signifier) resembles the signified in some way (for example, the road sign for a roundabout has a circle on it)" (Fludernik 102).She argues that if films are considered as a form of the narrative then the actions, gestures, movement, appearance, facial expression, costume, and sets used in them can be studied as iconic representations. In the present chapter Fludernik's argument of "the narratological concept of focalization in film" has been used because here movies are studied through the gaze of the two leading female characters who can be called "focalizers" since their perspectives filter the narrative (Fludernik 114).

The subjective point of view or perspective is achieved in films in many ways: viewers see through the eyes of the focalizer when a close-up shot of the character or his/her face is filmed (shot-reverse shot) prior to the showing of something else. The camera angle is also manipulated to establish perspective in film narratives.

For example, when in *English Vinglish* Shashi, the middle-aged house wife from India who is visiting New York to attend her niece's wedding, reads the English class advertisement on the body of a bus, her niece Radha's words are obliterated and the advertisement and the phone number are highlighted following Shashi's perspective (0:45:20-0:45:33)[7]. Thus Shashi is established as the focalizer here. To sum up, Fludernik underscores two ways of creating perspective in films in the following words, "film often makes use of the external view of a protagonist as a signal for a subsequent focalization using his/her point of view, or else unusual camera angles are used to create point of view" (114). Both these techniques have been used in *The Namesake* and *English Vinglish* convincingly to establish Ashima and Shashi as focalizers.

Shashi is framed as the focalizer who is looking at the big advertisement on a bus.

(i) *The Namesake*

Before delving into the specific focus of this section of Chapter Six, namely the analysis of Ashima's character, it is pertinent to discuss a few aspects of *The Namesake* that make it, if not a grand Hollywood success, at least a deeply moving family saga. Released in March 2007, this film by Mira Nair whose screenplay is written by Sooni Taraporevala has been acclaimed by both film and literary critics for its richly complex portrayal of people, places, and migrant dilemmas. Nair uses various signs to portray the mobility, dislocation and adaptation of the Gangulis in her cinematic version of Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel.

[7]Since I have documented the shots directly from the films there are no page references to mention. So; I have mentioned the timeframe within brackets wherever applicable.

Nair changed Boston for New York in *The Namesake* as the diasporic home of the Gangulis, who previously used to live in Calcutta. The director uses a variety of leitmotifs to juxtapose these two cities in order to create the sense of both closeness and distance. The signs that Nair deploys to create this juxtaposed image are colours, specific objects like bridges, and music. In their discourse of sign, signifier, and signified, Kress and Leeuwen observe how colour, perspective and line (signifiers) are used to realize meaning (signifieds) (5). They further note that the making of sign represents the complex cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker. Bearing a hyphenated identity like Jhumpa Lahiri, Nair also makes use of signs that represent her own history of dislocation[8].

The two bridges, the Howrah Bridge over the Hooghly River and Manhattan's 59th Street Bridge– both are focused through camera at several points of the film to create a pervasive metaphorical meaning. Giuseppe Balirano explains this metaphor as signifying the migrants' mobility as well as their connection with the past. He extends the metaphorical significance to more intricate themes of the film such as "division and re-union,… a reconciliation between the cities, between the East and the West and between the first and second generation Gangulis" (95). Bridges also appear in the scenes of Gogol's birth and before Ashoke's funeral. The continuation of life through birth and death are thus laced together by Nair's brilliant manipulation of bridges.

In *The Namesake* New York's cold winter weather appears in muted colours like gray, black and white, whereas humid Calcutta is painted in bright yellow, golden and red. The background sound changes from hushed to boisterous as soon as the characters land in India. However, the use of loud pop music in the scene of an encounter between a teenaged Gogol and his father highlights the former's fondness for surface level meaning, as he uses loud music here in order to shut out his father's words. On the other hand, the use of a spiritual vatiali song

[8] Mira Nair, born in India, went to North America for studying at Harvard University. She went to Uganda with her second husband Mahmood Mamdani and although she and her husband teach at Columbia University through the school year, they spend holidays in India and Kampala, Uganda. Thus she manages to spend time on three continents.

during the scene of scattering Ashoke's ashes in the Ganges hints at the mystical aura of India in spite of the country's over crowded streets and noisy ambience.

Literary critics, while discussing the camera version of *The Namesake*, also emphasize on the focusing of suitcases and airports by Nair as significant metaphors of diasporic life. The film starts with the camera zooming on a suitcase on the head of a coolie bearing the initial "A. Ganguli". A similar spectacle is created when Ashoke's family sets off to visit the Taj Mahal on their month long trip to India. Balirano (2008) notes that the suitcase symbolizes two separate things here. The suitcase in the first scene of the film preempts Ashoke's movement from home to diasporic space and the second one signifies the family's return to India not as residents but tourists.

Airports are considered as transitional places where people from different countries meet only to depart within a short while; almost all types of languages are spoken in this shifting space. In this film Nair uses airports to depict both departure and arrival on the surface level. On a more nuanced level airports here represent the lives of migrants who always feel dislocated as the diasporic home seems to be temporary to them and they feel like tourists in their homeland.

Thus Nair creates an ambience in the film where the character of Ashima symbolizes the contradiction of diasporic life in the form of agony and achievement. She contains the pathos of separation, yet attains the fulfilment of raising a family on a foreign land. She successfully treads the middle ground of two countries, two cultures and two languages like the perfect migrant subject she represents. Since this part of Chapter Six establishes her as a successful negotiator of cultural adaptation, the following paragraphs traces the growth of this character as seen through Nair's lens.

At the beginning of *The Namesake*, Ashima appears to be engrossed in taking music lessons (0:4:23-0:4:49). But immediately after that she is shown as the bride-to-be in an arranged marriage with Ashoke Ganguli, an immigrant student in the United States pursuing his PhD. During Ashoke's family's visit to her house prior to the marriage, Ashoke's father asks her whether she can travel half the way across the world, leaving her family behind, to live with Ashoke. Ashima is not hesitant to answer in the affirmative (0:9:13-0:9:14). This is a crucial point to be noted about her personality because it shows, early in the course of the film, that she

can make her own decisions. Her life in the USA embodies the duality of tradition and modernity in a consistent and pervasive manner. She always wears bangles and vermilion, marks of a married Indian woman. At the same time, she learns to adjust to the Americanized behavior of her children, starting from their food habit to choice of partners. Ashima's duality is not superficial and is inextricably linked to her inner self. She learns to drive, but cannot keep pace with fast American roads (0:54:23-0:54:42). She celebrates Christmas but makes greeting cards based on traditional Indian motifs (1:9:28-1:9:59). The quick decision she takes at the beginning of the movie of travelling to America is repeated once again when she decides to stay back in the house that belongs to her and Ashoke, at Pemberton, New York, instead of moving along with Ashoke to Ohio (1:6:28-1:6:37). Ashima breaks her bangles and wipes away the vermilion from her forehead after Ashoke's death, but tells Gogol that it was not necessary for him to shave his head (1:19:48-1:19:51) as a sign of mourning.

Ashima's character is unique in the sense that her adaptability in diasporic space is untypical. Gogol and Sonia, born and brought up in the USA, have to face lesser complications in adapting to the host culture as they do not have to bear the cultural baggage of the past. Ashoke, though a first generation immigrant like Ashima, makes a conscious choice of not going back to India as he sees America as a land of opportunities, where "Gogol can become whatever he wants" (0:25:17-0:25:19). Therefore, it is Ashima, the unwilling immigrant, who has to bargain the most in adapting to diasporic space. The all−pervasive duality of her personality is reflected in the ultimate decision of dividing her dwelling between America and India−six months in each place. Ashima internalizes the western values of self-dependence and individuality, and also learns to give her children their own space and freedom. Her work at the local library and friendships with white Americans indicate her openness to change. On the other hand, her concern for the grown-up Gogol, both when he first loses Maxine and then Moushumi, reflects the anxiety of an Indian mother. Perhaps the most striking feature of Ashima's acculturation is the equanimity she shows in balancing two starkly opposite cultures within her. Creating such a balance on her part is significant, because she does not have any one guiding her through this uneven journey.

Since *The Namesake* is a film based on a novel, it is pertinent to compare the written and film versions based on the depiction of Ashima's character. The film's director Mira Nair took

the liberty of portraying Ashima's character with bolder strokes than Jhumpa Lahiri did in the novel. In the novel, Lahiri mostly develops Ashima's character through introspection, that is, by portraying her thoughts more than her active presence. However, Nair makes her more expressive and outspoken. She renders the growth of Ashima's individual self through her bonding with her children and Ashoke and the way she lives after his death. Although in the novel Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the Gangulis as a couple who respect each other, she does not depict any romance in their relationships. In the film, however, Ashima is portrayed as a woman who is fully concerned about her individual entity, and also about the role she has to play with different people in her life. She is not only the wife of Ashoke, and the mother of their children, but also a woman who loves her husband. Her marriage was arranged, but she loved her husband by choice and not as a part of her wifely duty. Nair pays much attention to the development of the romantic relationship between Ashoke and Ashima by highlighting incidents only scantily mentioned in Lahiri's text. For example, Ashima mistakenly shrinks Ashoke's sweater in a washing machine.This leads to their first argument after marriage; the whole incident is described in one sentence in Lahiri's text (10). However, this incident is expanded into a beautifully romantic cinematic moment in Mira Nair's film where Ashima, hearing Ashoke's remonstrance about the shrunken clothes, locks herself in the bathroom to cry (15:33-17:00). Ashoke's attempt to calm down Ashima and make up to her in that scene initiates the tenderness between them, something that keeps growing in the course of the film.

Comparing the print and screen versions of *The Namesake,* Madhurima Chakraborty (2014) argues that whereas Lahiri represents migrancy as "a state beyond the simple interaction of monolithically construed home and host lands,…" Nair "not only reaffirms home and hostas opposed binaries, but also, in creating this simplistic and dual identity, resorts to nation-statist associations of homeland with authentic identity…" (612, 616). She further observes that the film is less transnational and more nation-statist because "though the diaspora is transnational, diasporic culture makes no such commitment to questioning or compromising nation states" (619). Thus Chakraborty argues that as opposed to Lahiri's representation of diaspora as transnational, Nair makes her film portray the homeland and the host land as binaries and having monolithic appearances. However, in my analysis, though the film's overall message remains that diaspora is nostalgic about a homeland that is seen as static; Nair develops Ashima's character in a transnational way. The way she negotiates her identity in the diasporic space

reaffirms the fact that she is capable of navigating between the home and host culture without being perpetually stuck anywhere. This point is illustrated in the following paragraphs using examples from the film version of *The Namesake*.

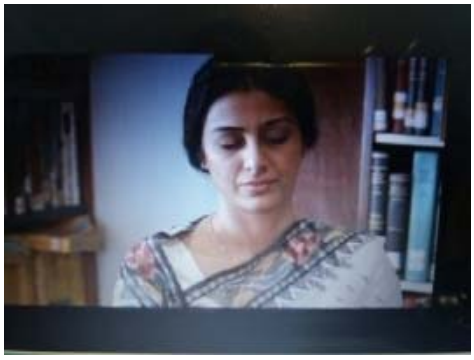
Nair's representation of a number of love relationships on screen accentuates Ashima's embodiment of Indian culture as well as adaptation of American ways. Unlike Gogol's relationships with either Maxine or Moushumi, which rely heavily on physical proximity, Ashima and Ashoke's bonding seems to be more spiritual and based on mutual love and respect. Ashima's reluctance to pronounce the words "I love you" like "Americans", as she terms it in the scene inside Victoria Memorial, reaffirms her stance of maintaining the tradition that considers displaying emotions openly as immodest (44:19-44:14). However, she does not want to disappoint Ashoke and at one point declares spontaneously that she loves him.

Ashima tells Ashoke "I love you" like the Americans.

This duality in Ashima between tradition and modernity is visible in other instances of the film version of *The Namesake* in which she appears to be stronger as a character than the book allows her to be. For example, she tells the nurse of her discomfort about the length of the hospital apron during her stay in the hospital at the time of Gogol's birth. The nurse covers her legs with a blanket to relax Ashima somewhat at this point (20:08-20:33). In the novel, Ashima keeps her uneasiness to herself.

Three more striking scenes in the film outline Ashima's individuality in a way that the novel does not. The first one occurs when a white American friend at the library asks Ashima to imagine a moment of bliss in her life by closing her eyes and thinking about the moment when she had felt most intensely happy in life. When Ashima closes her eyes, like a revelation it

occurs to her that she would be free from bondage by leaving America after selling their American house (1:39:14-1:39:44). Here the disposal of property symbolically refers to her eagerness to tear all roots and become free. Her ultimate decision of living in both America and India is another example of a preference for a fluid existence as opposed to being comfortable with confinement in a particular space. Ashima's decision to be borderless, a character trait reflecting her name, establishes her identity as the ideal transnational citizen.



Ashima's blissful moment.

When Moushumi asks Ashima whether she minds that Sonia's husband Ben is not Indian, Ashima answers in the negative, and says: "times have changed…no I don't mind" (1:40:44-1:40:54). Through such a candid declaration, Nair shows how Ashima is now capable of adapting and adept at negotiating her identity. The most significant sequence in the film that establishes her as a strong individual contains the speech she delivers at the last party she throws at their Pemberton house. In it, she talks about her life's journey, and also about how she is defined by her years in America, not India. In the book, Jhumpa Lahiri presents these words as Ashima's interior thought. By changing the interior thought into a speech before guests Nair portrays an Ashima who is not hesitant to express her innermost thoughts. The film version of *The Namesake* thus redefines her in a new light and images her with bolder strokes.

The patriarchal values are subtly operative within the narrative of *The Namesake* as Ashoke is portrayed here as a compassionate husband, as to typical representative of patriarchy. From Ashima's perspective, the narrative seems to be seamlessly complicit with the traditionally patriarchal social framework of India. An arranged marriage had brought Ashima and Ashoke together and she had started her life in the host country depending on her husband, both socially and financially. After the birth of Gogol, she complies with Ashoke's resolution of staying back

in America, although she wants to return home at that point. Her emancipation thrives in the space she is comfortable alongside the patriarchal boundary and not by shattering it. Nevertheless, the strong individual that is born within Ashima is evident in her embracing life once again after losing Ashoke, by seeking inner peace in musical lessons. Through the revival of passion for music in her, Ashima manages to create her own personal space at the end.

(ii) *English Vinglish*:

Unlike *The Namesake*, *English Vinglish* operates crudely and overtly within a strong patriarchal mould treating it as normative. Shashi, the central character of the movie, is a middle−aged housewife who is continually harassed by her husband and teen-aged daughter for her failure to communicate in English. She toils all day long in serving her family but this labour is utterly undervalued by her family members. Although she possesses great culinary skills and runs a small household business selling homemade laddoos at a good price, the constant humiliation she suffers at home saps her self−confidence. She seems alright while interacting with outsiders, like laddoo buyers or even her daughter's teacher at school, but it is within her house and with her family members, that she feels unsure of herself. The strong patriarchal overtone of Indian society is depicted by Shinde through Satish's character who treats his wife Shashi as no better than a useful household object. However, this overtone is refreshingly deconstructed in the portrayal of the warm female bonding, firstly between Shashi and her mother-in-law, and secondly between Shashi and her niece Radha in New York.

Gauri Shinde's *English Vinglish* utilizes a number of tropes to develop the central character Shashi who is aware of the domestic discriminations she has to endure because of her not knowing English and because of being a simple housewife who does not question the way her family members treat her. In this film, the director invests various day to day objects with meaning to convey her message to the viewers. For example, she makes a newspaper a persistent symbol of expressing the status of a certain character. The film begins and ends with Shashi's encounter with newspapers. In the first scene it is shown that both Hindi and English newspapers arrive at their Pune house and she reads the Hindi one, whereas the English one in preserved for her husband, the smart, dignified, superior Satish. In the last scene inside the plane, where the family is taking their journey from New York back home, the air hostess asks which newspaper they would like to read. Satish asks for the *New York Times* and Shashi also spontaneously asks

for the same, only to change her mind after seconds, and asks whether they have any Hindi newspaper. The last scene implies the traversing of Shashi who now wants to read Hindi not as the only option available to her, but out of love for her mother tongue. This choice makes it clear that she learns English only to uplift her sense of dignity, not to make it an integral part of her life.

Food is another important leitmotif of the film as through the making of laddoos Shashi creates her identity. It is also worth noting that her ability of cooking excellent food is the only thing that Satish values about her. Shashi feels confident and happy when her customers praise her but ironically when her husband tells her that she was born to make laddoos, she feels humiliated. Reducing the wife to the status of someone who can just make good sweets is a patriarchal trope utilized by Shinde to make Satish look like an insensitive husband.

But it is language that is undoubtedly the most pervasive symbol of the film since it plays a vital role in the making of Shashi's new identity. From the beginning of the film she faces alienation and humiliation in her family as her husband and daughter unitedly ridicule her for her wrong pronunciation. She also feels unsure of herself before other parents from her daughter's school and before Satish's colleagues.

In New York when everyone from his sister's house speaks English with Kevin, the American groom of her niece Meera, Shashi feels uncomfortable and goes back to her room. She again suffers extreme embarrassment in the coffee shop where the woman at the counter insults her for poor English. However, it is noteworthy that she feels comfortable with her American teacher David, as she feels that no one will belittle her in the English class. The multi-lingual classroom in the New York Language Center symbolizes a harmonious space free from gender and racial biases. This is the place where Shashi starts to grow as an individual sculpting her own identity. The next sections of this chapter follows Shashi's quest for discovering her individual self that initializes in the English class.

The storyline of *English Vinglish* depicts Shashi's reluctant and lonely journey to New York to attend the wedding of her niece. Secretly, she takes a month-long English language course during the stay. A change can be seen in Shashi's attitude just after she boards the plane when she sips wine according to the advice of her co-passenger (played by Amitabh Bachchan).

The adventure that starts that way continues as she successfully enrolls for the English course on her own, paying the tuition fee with the money she saved by selling laddoos. Shashi's craving for an independent identity is evident in the way she enjoys the new title of "entrepreneur" given to her by her English teacher (0:55:16-0:55:33). She celebrates her new name by dancing on the street, but her enthusiasm is deflated as her husband shows indifference to it. However, she does not question his lack of interest and accepts it as normative.

Although Shashi has learned to speak English, how far she has been able to emancipate herself remains unclear at the end of the film. While the movie shows her inner struggle between tradition and modernity, she ultimately submits to the culturally defined role of an ideal housewife. She suppresses her feelings for Laurent, the French classmate who is romantically inclined to her. She also feels guilty as she is busy attending an English class when her son gets hurt. Shashi's internalization of her culturally defined role is too deep-rooted to make her see herself as an individual with personal longings. It is questionable whether her accomplishment makes her a better caretaker of the family or brings any radical changes in her. The wedding speech Shashi delivers towards the end of the movie is not meant to destabilize the existing mould of the society; it is rather used to strengthen it through the insertion of moral and familial values. The conciliatory tone of the speech embodies Shashi's type of emancipation, which is tempered with both tradition and modernity.

Unlike Ashima in *The Namesake,* Shashi in *English Vinglish* is eager to prove her worth before her family members through her struggle to learn English. Though this struggle begins as a means to increase her worth in the family, Shashi makes a self-discovery in the process and begins to question the present order of things in the society she is a part of. For example, after being praised for her culinary skill in the English class by everyone, she becomes aware of her talents. That awareness prompts her to tell Laurent sarcastically that "man cooking art, lady cooking daily job, duty" (1:07:20-1:07:28). She also expresses her disgust at her daughter who insults her on the phone by saying that children have no right to treat their parents so disrespectfully (1:15:04-1:15:20). Noticeably, Shashi is treated very poorly by her husband and daughter from the very beginning of the film, but she starts to question such treatment after joining the English class in New York, for this is an act that helps her develop subject position to an extent. Because of her newly-found self-consciousness, she finds it harder to tolerate Satish's

taunt that she was born to make laddoos, and tells Radha that all she needs is a little respect (1:50:37-1:50:44).

As stated earlier, Shashi's self-discovery does not lead to a sustainable change in her way of thinking; Shinde portrays her as too conditioned by patriarchal values to change, specifically after her family joins her in New York one week before their expected arrival. She seems to think that taking care of the family is more important for her than the English classes. Thus, Shashi's brief stay in New York brings a welcome change in her, if only temporarily.

Shashi is going back to her previous life with her family.

Even after making her self-discovery, Shashi does not directly question her husband or daughter about their demeaning behavior towards her; rather, she accepts them as they are. Compared to Ashima, Shashi proves to be a much weaker character and someone willing to sacrifice her individuality for the sake of her family. Ashima chose to stay back in New York when Ashoke moved to Ohio. At the end, Ashima chooses to leave her children to find bliss in India. These two incidents prove that unlike Shashi, Ashima values her individuality to a much greater extent.

Both Ashima and Shashi are split between tradition and modernity, albeit in distinctive ways. In her insightful essay "The Habit of Ex-nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Bourgeoisie" Anannya Bhattacharjee argues that Indian immigrants create the idea of a nation which is ahistorical and not a geographically bound unit. She opines that this idea of a nation, in absence of any historical context, is constituted of "a timeless essence of Indian unity in diversity", and "the question of women [is] inextricably linked to nation-ness"(Bhattacharjee 20-28). She also observes that "…Indian woman is expected to be responsible for maintaining this Indian home in diaspora by remaining true to her Indian womanhood" (Bhattacharjee 32). This idea of women as embodying culture, as defined by postcolonial nationhood, along with the

patriarchal value system of the society, condition Ashima and Shashi in such a way that they always act within the given structure without even being aware of it. The level of internalization of these culturally modified values by Ashima and Shashi, especially the latter, is too deep to be transformed. However, these two female characters have gone through transformations and have come a long way.

Diasporic films depict the existence of tradition and modernity in subjects like Ashima and Shashi by linking the subjects to their postcolonial past. Indeed, postcolonial nationalistic ideology imbues women with cultural values and represents them as preservers of rituals. Hence it is impossible for first-generation woman migrants to forego their traditionally tailored roles as docile mother, wife, and daughter. However, the mutation caused by their diasporic existence is also a powerfultrait of their character; therefore, it also has to be reckoned as an effect caused by globalization. In this vein, Arjun Appadurai's (2010) words are immensely relevant as he opines that while in a new diasporic space women might enjoy the fruits of capital and technology, in the domestic space they have to recreate the family as the microcosm of culture. Appadurai observes that “both work and leisure have lost none of their gendered qualities”. Even in a new global order, the segregation of genders has acquired “ever subtler fetishized representations” (qtd. in Sathian 25). As a consequence, diasporic women have to negotiate harsh conditions at work as well as strive “to reproduce the family as microcosm of culture” (ibid).

As Appadurai (2010) also points out, diasporic women have to face challenges both in their workplace and inside the family. Whereas they have to deploy modern techniques to be successful at the workplace, traditional practices give them more acceptability at home. This intrinsic contradiction in diasporic women's lives is evident in Ashima and Shashi in both overt and covert forms. The diasporic woman has to balance her external and internal life by juggling roles. Whereas on the outside world she has to negotiate and adapt to her diasporic identity, inside the home she has to strive to conserve her culture. However, somewhere between these two ends, she strives to find the empowerment that enables her to enjoy the fruits of capital and technology, and to go beyond the confinement of household identity. This opportunity offered by diasporic existence leads her to the sculpting of a new identity.

The conundrum the woman characters of the two movies discussed go through can be assimilated to Stuart Hall’s views on identity. In their juggling between modernity and tradition,

Ashima and Shashi from *The Namesake* and *English Vinglish*, conform to the idea of "cultural identity" coined by Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (234). According to Hall, cultural identity can be studied in at least two ways. Whereas the first kind of cultural identity reflects the shared historical experiences and cultural codes of a given people, the second, and more complicated type of cultural identity "is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" (Hall 236). This second kind of cultural identity is associated with a constant transformation and therefore eschews fixity of essence. It is unstable in nature. Cultural identity can be either complicit with, or at variance with, historical orientation; it can even be both at the same time. That is why Hall defines cultural identity as "[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*" (237). Ashima and Shashi embody this cultural identity as they are both complicit with, and at variance with their historical positionality.

So far in this dissertation, it has been argued that diasporic South Asian female identity is often fluid and flexible, largely because women in the diaspora usually have to adhere to demands made by the host country for adaptation, as well as to the demands made by their families to uphold their home culture. This identitarian fluidity of diasporic South Asian women had been explained in the light of postcolonial and postmodern feminism in the previous chapters. The works of fiction authored by the three diasporic Indian female writers were studied in them to establish the view that women in the diaspora perpetually struggle to define their identities in fragmented subject positions. The present chapter adds to the basic argument developed in the preceding ones by discussing two films that deal with the lives of two diasporic South Asian women.

Why this dissertation studies South Asian films can be explained in two ways. Firstly, literary studies are now frequently merged with visual media. Secondly, despite unfavorable criticism, the existence of Asian American films cannot be ignored in contemporary cultural scenario. Genres have become too supple to be compartmentalized easily in our time. In many universities, literature departments have incorporated adaptation theory and media studies in order to broaden the perspective of literature. South Asian diasporic cinema, the focus of which is the lives of diasporic people mostly in the UK and the USA, has already had a significant impact on the visual media. It is therefore appropriate to include filmic texts in literary discussion as they help provide a different viewpoint on literature. However, diasporic cinemas,

particularly Asian American films, can run the risk of being subject to overgeneralization. Somdatta Mandal, for example, expresses her doubt about "Asian American cinema" as a category by saying that this term "which includes works in video and film, implies first of all that there is such a thing as Asian American Culture, but at the same time questions are raised as to whether anything as a unified Asian American Culture exists or not" ("Of 'Soups', 'Salads', 'Chutneys' and 'Masalas': The Asian American Film Experience." The Asian American Film Experience." n.pag.). Still Mira Nair, as a diasporic Asian film director making films in America, would assess the film *The Namesake* as a "non-Caucasian film on a Caucasian budget" (qtd. in Chakraborty 618). It is therefore possible to conclude that in spite of the diversities among Asian Americans, terms like Asian American cinema do exist in the cultural world.

Films that depict Asian American people's struggle to balance between two cultures can be considered as a part of diasporic cultural studies. Diasporic cultural studies is inclusive of, though not limited to, transnational practices and thoughts of migrants who are influenced by the globalization of economy and culture (Desai 2004). In this chapter, we see that the protagonists of *The Namesake* and *English Vinglish* are subjected to transnational practices such as border crossing and learning new languages, driven by economy and culture. As is argued in the dissertation, women face a more strenuous situation than men in balancing between the home and the host cultures as society places on them the responsibility for upholding the native culture. The previous chapters had attempted to suggest that migrant women go through transformative journeys in diasporic space at the end of which they are empowered to create individual identities. This vein of discussion is expanded in the present chapter by studying two films as part of diasporic cultural studies. Studies of films adapted from books facilitate the comparative study of film and literature. Among the two films analyzed in the present chapter, one is adapted from a popular novel. Both the films' plots center around two diasporic female protagonists who struggle to create identities from positions stuck between tradition and modernity. Therefore, this discussion on films aptly supplements the basic argument of the previous chapters which relied on exclusively texts written by three diasporic South Asian writers.

Conclusion: Quest for a Flexible Self

This dissertation takes its root from the concept of instability found in fictions about women characters in diasporic space. In developing the argument, I have focused on South Asian women's identity formations in the USA. Exploring fictional works by Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri I have concluded that the pivotal female characters of the texts go through a complex trajectory in refashioning their identities in order to create their own individual places in the host land. The process of transformation is jagged and poignant, and often leaves the characters bewildered. The contradictory importunities of the family on the one hand and mainstream society on the other, render the characters in a confused state. However, showing considerable resilience, they surmount the confusion in the end by refashioning their identities in such a way that the instability, instead of working as an impediment, becomes a route for creating agency.

The texts under discussion place the characters at junctures of their lives where it becomes crucial to make choices that play a vital role in sculpting their subject positions. Whereas apparently it may seem that these fictional South Asian women are free to make their choices, in reality, they are conditioned by phenomena like history, race, and obviously, gender. Both first and second-generation migrant women have to walk a tightrope with tradition at one end and modernity at the other. Additionally, they have to adhere to the requirements placed on their shoulders by both family and mainstream society. This is why some of the characters analyzed in the dissertation choose to hide the way they feel and fabricate socially acceptable identities. In the course of the dissertation, I focused on a number of characters who struggle with making choices that they consider best in the formation of their identities.

Since the fictional female characters have to deal with dilemmas, many of them develop into fragmented and incoherent selves devoid of any fixed subject position. In *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature* Edward E. Sampson (1993) criticizesWestern culture's centuries-long preoccupation with a dominant, contained, individualistic, and monologic self by creating a dialogic relationship with suppressed subjects like women, African-

Americans, and others belonging not to the dominant class. Sampson believes that the monologic self can benefitby enriching itself through its integration with others.

I argue here that the multiplicity of self in South Asian migrant women helps them attain empowerment by giving them agency of making choices. Empowerment implies making choices and being able to take responsibility for them. Barbara Rowland-Serdar and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea observe that empowerment involves making choices that "challenge prevailing cultural messages" (609). These critics maintain that women need to sort out issues with their cultural past by refashioning the past events into "a new and more meaningful story" (Rowland-Serdar, Schwartz-Shea 613). Diasporic women thus reconstruct subjectivity through reflection on their present culture and by relocating their histories.

In articulating the idea of liberation through the flexibility of self I take cues from Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea when they explain the terms "respond" and "react" (616). In order to attain emancipation and subsequent autonomy, women need to go through a process of growth. This process involves learning to respond rather than react. Reaction implies making choices based on other people's expectations. Reacting occurs when women internalize beliefs, perspectives, and perceptions that belong to others. As a matter of fact, women are less likely to achieve autonomy as long as they react to things that happen around them. On the other hand, responding implies the ability to make choices based on self-knowledge, inherited values, and priorities. Therefore, migrant women are most likely to achieve autonomy through transformations based on their independent choices.

The arguments developed in the dissertation revolve around the proposition that South Asian females, while encountering pulls from both home and host cultures, feel challenged in making choices. These choices are symptomatic of the psychological growth of the female subjects. My reading of these characters reveals that their identity formation is skewed rather than linear. It suggests that the identity construction, instead of following some set rules of conduct, is based on adjustments and negotiations. Therefore, the innovated identities of the subjects tell their particular stories of struggle of navigating between and through more than one culture. I argue that the process of identity formation is an emotionally challenging one because it sometimes involves going against the normative practices of someone's native culture. On the other hand, it sometimes requires the subjects to act awkwardly before the people of the host

land to conform to their native culture. Consequently, making choices proves to be a complicated task on the part of the migrant female subjects.

After developing the historical and theoretical frameworks in the first and second chapters of this dissertation, I discuss the process of identity formation of some fictional South Asian migrant women from the third chapter onwards. Three novels, *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee, *Queen of Dreams* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri are studied in the third chapter of the dissertation. The discussion here is based on the contingency offered to the central characters by diasporic space to refashion identities. Forming new identities is poignant in many senses as it requires forfeiting of parts of one's previous self. Remolding of identity also involves treading unknown terrains. The third chapter shows how the philosophical and technical structures of the host culture help diasporic women carve agencies. However, the discussion also takes up issues of racism in the form of neo-imperialism in the United States. It is notable that these issues of racism are still relevant to contemporary questions such as ISIS atrocities leading to Islam phobia, coupled with Donald Trump's taking over power.[i]

In all the three novels mentioned in the previous paragraph, racial hatred in the US has been presented in both covert and overt forms. Mukherjee depicts the cruelty shown to illegal immigrants in the USA in a graphic manner. Divakaruni realistically portrays the crucial period that immigrant Americans passed after the bombing of the Twin Towers in 2001. Lahiri, through the treatment of Gauri Mitra in *The Lowland* as an Indian scholar in America, shows how racism works subtly even when it is not displayed in a crass manner. Therefore, although in this dissertation I mostly show the USA as a favorable ground for the growth of migrant women, the creepy questions of racism are by no means overlooked here.

The fourth chapter deals with some short stories from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* in which there are female characters who undergo transformations in their diasporic trajectories. I argued that the characters considered, despite being unique, display traits such as ambivalence and adaptation. However, the degree of these traits and each character's reaction to them are idiosyncratic. For example, in the story "Meeting Mrinal", two childhood friends meet after ages, much altered by the experiences of life. Their meeting reveals to the readers that on the inside both struggle with contradictions; however, their expressions are quite

opposite. Asha, who lives in the USA, does not divulge the fact of her broken marriage to Mrinal, the cosmopolitan friend who has little faith in social bonding. Despite being cynical about marriage, Mrinal feels a big void inside her as she leads a single life. The two friends ironically envy each other, while pretending to be happy in their fake current status of life.

In the fifth chapter, I discuss some female characters from Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth,* building an argument about their development in diasporic space through adaptation of the new culture. Here I speculate that the diasporic women are resilient in taking responsibility for their choices. Their choices do not necessarily always lead to happiness, rather often bring emotional turmoil. However, they have the strength for making choices as well as for taking their consequences. Thus, we see Hema from the story "Going Ashore" making choices that contradict her yearning. However, without holding anyone responsible for her mental agony caused by her marriage to Navin, she is conscious that only she is liable for her decision and is predisposed to encounter the outcome.

The sixth chapter, unlike all other chapters in the dissertation, deals with two South Asian diasporic films, one from America, and the other from India. This chapter further the arguments of the previous chapters. In this chapter, I study two South Asian women who go through the process of negotiation with the host culture and prove themselves capable of striking a balance between the home and host culture. However, even after proving themselves as successful negotiators, they choose to refashion their identities as more than mediators. Ashima Ganguli from the film *The Namesake* decides to become a nomad at the end by remaining at home both in America and India. Shashi Godbole from *English Vinglish,* despite taking in the taste of emancipation in diasporic space, finally resolves to embrace her previous life in India.

The individual chapters of the dissertation independently tie up the epistemological frame of the basic argument in the form of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminisms. Postcolonial feminism reveals how South Asian diasporic women encounter tugging from both the past and the present, and how they have to deal with residues of neo-colonialism in the form of racism. Postmodern feminism's locus is to interpret the fragmented, flexible, and ambivalent identity of female migrants who at certain points of their lives have to resort to contradictory choices to find a balance among the expectations imposed on them by family and society. Diaspora feminism focalizes the transnational turn in women that endows them with the power

of accommodating multiple cultures in a cosmopolitan world. All the chapters of the dissertation bind different strands of feminist theories by dovetailing them methodically.

This dissertation attempts to show that South Asian women in diasporic space refashion their identities in a manner that can be interpreted as a certain kind of emancipation since their transformations enable them to not only make choices but also to take responsibility for those choices. It will be obvious to the reader of the preceding pages that I consider the transformation of migrant women in diasporic space as liberating and empowering, even if the change might sometimes be accompanied by contradiction and ambivalence. This is not to say that there was success of all the endeavors attempted by the fictional women whose stories have been studied in the previous chapters. But what the fictions show is their acquiring the capability of making choices and having the strength of taking responsibility for those choices. Here the idea of empowerment concurs with Monique Deveaux's perception of women's freedom as she develops the term in her essay "Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault".

Deveaux views women's freedom not as maneuvering or resisting within a power dynamic, but as a state in which a woman feels "empowered in her specific context" (234). While analyzing Foucault's epistemology of power, Deveaux observes that this theory is inadequate to explain how women's sense of freedom works. Foucault understands power relations mostly from how they are institutionally installed, rather than from the perspectives of people who are subject to power. Women's freedom does not always involve resistance against outer forces. Attaining freedom on the part of women often requires surmounting internal obstacles, more than external ones. Deveaux notes that women encounter two kinds of impediments in their quest for freedom. The first is an internal one, of making choices. The second one is external and tangible and implies the obstacles they face in realizing their choices. The characters studied in the dissertation face both types of impediments in their lives. They have to overcome their internal conditioning while taking decisions contrary to their familial and cultural values. On the other hand, they have to encounter external obstacles while materializing their choices.

Making empowerment more of a personal goal than a political one, Deveaux sums up her argument by noting that an alternative vision of power, other than the Foucauldian notion of the omnipresence of power, has to be developed to configure women's empowerment. This

alternative vision of power has to be based on a personal level, as noted by Patricia Hill Collins, "of self- actualization, self-definition, and self-determination (qtd. in Deveaux 243). Such empowerment takes into consideration the particularity of women's specific race, class, age, and historical orientation. In my dissertation, I emphasize such plurality among women by arguing that each character analyzed here paved her own unique way towards empowerment within the broader epistemological frame shared by the other characters. As a consequence, we observe divergent formations of identities that converge on a broad level under the framework of postcolonial, postmodern, and diasporic feminisms.

Since the dissertation discusses three individual writers, it is imperative to see them in a contrastive manner although the scope of this work allowed this writer limited opportunity to do so. However, here I will initiate a brief comparative study of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri based on the texts that have been part of the discussion in the previous chapters so that further study can be pursued in this area in the future.

In writing the previous chapters, it became obvious to me that dissimilarities rule over similarities in the dealing of the same theme by these writers. For example, Bharati Mukherjee assumes the role of a distant onlooker while dissecting the experience of migrant subjects in North America. It is also worth noting that she chronicles the life of migrants from different corners of the world, instead of focusing only on South Asians. Jhumpa Lahiri, on the other hand, treats migration as the individual experiences of people rather than treating it as a socio-political phenomenon. In the essay "Representing Asian Americans in Short Fiction: The Stories of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri" Fakrul Alam observes that whereas Mukherjee is inclined to "illustrate specific arguments about emigration to North America" Lahiri, instead of developing "any particular thesis about ordinary South Asians in a new world" explores "epiphanies they will experience in the course of their movements across continents" (361-62). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni deals with the question of migration in an ambiguous way, in depicting the way it liberates migrants but at the same time compels them to make poignant choices between tradition and modernity.

Following Alam's cue it is possible to discern the individual ways in which Mukherjee and Lahiri unfold the life stories of their fictional migrant characters in North America. Divakaruni also has her unique way of narrating the experiences of the expatriates of her fiction.

Unlike Mukherjee and Lahiri, Divakaruni mostly focuses on the romantic endeavors of the characters that create tension among them because of racial and cultural differences. Divakaruni also resorts to supernatural interventions to add a mystical twist in the lives of the migrants she depicts. In *Queen of Dreams*, much like her more acclaimed novel *The Mistress of Spices*, she introduces the healing power of magic in mitigating diasporic woes. Divakaruni specially presents her female characters as having high moral standards and personal integrity. This trait makes them less flexible than Mukherjee's Jasmine, who, in her insatiable quest for new adventures, discards old relationships without much regret. Divakaruni's characters are more obligated by their families to conform to native culture, unlike Lahiri's characters. They are also more concerned about their personal choices of right and wrong that position them at the crossroad of diasporic dilemmas. For example, the fourth story "The Word Love" in *Arranged Marriage* tells the story of a girl who truncates her love affair with an American to conform to her mother's wish. She eventually goes beyond her mother's admonitions, leaving both the mother and the boyfriend, and choosing to tread on her lonely individual path. Lahiri's character Ruma from the titular story "Unaccustomed Earth" faces little or no inhibition in marrying an American. Both Sudha from "Only Goodness" and Usha from "Hell-Heaven" choose foreign men as their love interests without facing any kind of major objections from the family.

Divakaruni makes the second generation immigrant Rakhi from *Queen of Dreams*yearn for her unknown native land in a romantic way. She is the stark opposite of Jasmine who has bitter memories of her home country that prompts her to seek opportunities of building a new self in the host country. Rakhi experiences the trauma of 9/11with her friends. Their encounter with the violent racial attack that follows is a very personal experience and one shared among family and friends. On the other hand, in *Jasmine* Mukherjee represents the racial discriminations in a more universal light. She generalizes it instead of making it Jasmine's personal experience. Like a neutral sociologist, she considers racial hatred from an academic viewpoint, attempting to analyze its cause and effect.

In her typical understated tone Lahiri portrays the character of Gauri in *The Lowland*as different from both Jasmine and Rakhi in many ways. In Mukherjee's *Jasmine* the writer lets her protagonist explore the immigrant experience at times as a violent one. It breaks and remakes her in whirlwind fashion. In addition to Jasmine, Mukherjee narrates many other harrowing tales of

Mexican and Vietnamese immigrants' diasporic journeys in North America. She focuses on Jasmine's identity formation as a process that develops in many politico-socio-economic contexts. Divakaruni's Rakhi unfolds her diasporic identity in a more individual way involving the family and personal relationships rather than stressing the larger socio-political ambience of her surroundings. Both Jasmine in *Jasmine* and Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams* can be juxtaposed against the cold representation of Gouri in *The Lowland* as Lahiri places her not among a community or a family, but develops her as a lonely figure too willing to shed the baggage of personal relationships. Lahiri's migrants deal with the agonies of diasporic life on a personal level, through small incidents of surprise, adaptation and acceptance. For example, when Gauri in *The Lowland* prepares to attend a prestigious academic conference, the cab driver cannot imagine her to be the speaker. He thinks her as the person hired to open the door. Gauri accepts this incident in an emotionlessly calm way, so typical of Lahiri's characters.

In his feelingly informative contrastive study of Mukherjee and Lahiri, Alam argues that Mukherjee analyzes the lives of migrants of NorthAmerica from a historically conscious perspective to conclude that liberal attitude from both "white, older, Americans as well as the new migrants from Asia"is the only way to a peaceful coexistence by letting go of "preconceptions and racist or ghetto mentalities…" (372). Alam concludes his summation of Lahiri's disposition towards migrants by noting that her understated characters "have been living normal lives and adjusting to everyday America quietly but feelingly" (ibid). Divakaruni's characters, in a sense, are a combination of politico-historical realities as well as passionate individuals who translate their diasporic lives in unique ways. Therefore, it can be concluded that Divakaruni's characters reflect both the traits that Mukherjee's and Lahiri's migrants possess.

In concluding, I would like to posit that despite the agony and uncertainty the characters of Mukherjee, Lahiri and Divakaruni face, most South Asian female migrants emerge as strong individuals after completing their diasporic trajectories. While facing crucial situations they develop into independent persons in the following ways: (i) keep a balance between tradition and modernity; (ii) make choices based on their own mediation; (iii) and take responsibility for their choices. Diasporic life is not easy since it necessitates making adjustments on many levels. Even after adapting to the host culture, it is not always possible for these women to attain access in

mainstream society. Extra pressure from family and the home community to uphold their native culture often leaves migrant women bewildered.

Therefore, I think the fictional women studied in the dissertation represent real-life situations in many aspects. Real women in diasporic space can find solace in the fictional women's lives and realize that it is not their fault to have contradictory and fragmented selves. It is natural for them to feel uncertain, since this uncertainty encourages them to make choices, paving the way towards empowerment. Thus a new woman may be born for whom ambivalences do not work as impediments, but prove to be liberating.

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[i]The overt racism expressed by Trump at different times continues even after he became the president of the US. On 12 August 2017, one woman was killed while taking part in a rally countering white supremacist protestersin Charlottesville, Virginia. Trump's speech on this tragedy was interpreted by one media as morally compromised since he accused both the parties involved instead of castigating the attackers for upholding racial hatred.

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