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**The Cassandras in Exile: A Study of the
Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of
Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra
Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean
Arasanayagam**

**A Thesis
Submitted to
Saurashtra University, Rajkot
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work embodied in this thesis entitled **The Cassandras in Exile: A Study of the Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arasanayagam** has been carried out by Mr. Dushyant B Nimavat under my direct guidance and supervision. I declare that the work done and presented in this thesis is original and independent.

I, further, certify that this work has not been submitted to any other institute or university for any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that the research work presented in this thesis is original and all the sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

I, further, declare that his work not been submitted to any other institute or university for any degree of diploma.

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CHAPTER- I

Introduction

CHAPTER-1

Introduction: Defining 'Diaspora'

Diaspora women poets discussed in this thesis are called 'Cassandras in exile' as their solitary silence is implicit in the fate and voice of Cassandra, the female prophet of Greek mythology punished by Zeus. She was awarded a gift of prophecy to which no one would listen. Cassandra thus symbolizes the plight of a woman poet. Like Cassandra, the poet is isolated by her poetic gift. Ironically, both strength and weakness lie at the root of her gift of prophecy. She is chosen by the divinity but also condemned to suffer. She is empowered with the gift of singing but ignored by all. The myth of Cassandra will be dealt with at length in chapter three later.

There is an innate opposition embedded in the etymology of the term *diaspora*, of Greek origin, which reflects how double-edged the concept can be: *dia-* a preposition which, when used in compound words, means 'division' and 'dispersion' and *-spiro* literally means, 'to sow the seeds'. This suggests, on the one hand, the idea of dispersion and on the other, that of stasis and stability sowing seed, suggesting new life and new roots.

Diaspora studies is a field struggling with the following issues, according to Susan S. Friedman's proposal *Migration and Diaspora: Cultural Theory of Representation* (2008:2),

"The multiple meanings and models of diaspora and migration; the relation of migration and diaspora to conquest, colonialism, post-colonialism, refugeesism, political exile, etc; the heterogeneity of diasporic groups, especially by gender, class, sexuality, caste, religion (etc); the problematic and potentials of assimilation, acculturation, and transculturation, nativism and the hostility of host lands, generational conflicts and continuities in the (re) production of culture; the role of language and other cultural practices in

migratory experiences; the significance of memory for the production of what Salman Rushdie calls “imaginary homelands”; the phenomenological dimensions of migration and diaspora (loss, between worlds, nostalgia) depression, exhilaration etc); etc. ”

And a field like this hardly fits itself to the limiting and centering powers of definitions and theories. That is why there are a lot of arguments between scholars as to what ‘Diaspora’ and ‘Diaspora studies’ mean: Diaspora as located between cultures and between majority and minority, nation and nonnation, citizen and foreigner, original and hybrid often goes beyond the centering theories of humanities. Before discussing the various arguments about Diaspora, different definitions of the term must to be considered.

Etymological meaning of the word ‘diaspora’ is “to scatter about, disperse” from ‘dia’-“about, across” + ‘speirein “to scatter” (originally from in Deut. XXVIII: 25.)

- noun
- The scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity.
- (often lowercase) the body of the Jews living in countries outside Palestine or modern Israel.
- Such countries collectively: the return of the Jews from the Diaspora.
- (lower case) any group migration or flight from a country or region: dispersion.
- (lowercase) any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland.
- (lower case) any religious group living as a minority among people of prevailing religion. ¹

The OED (*Oxford English Dictionary*) defines 'diaspora' as "the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into new regions". Under colonialism, it refers to multifarious movements, involving, the temporary or permanent movement of Europeans all over the world, leading to colonial settlements. Consequently, the ensuing economic exploitation of the settled areas necessitated large amount of labour that could not be fulfilled by the local populace. This led to the diaspora resulting from the enslavement of the Africans and their relocation to places like the British Colonies. After slavery was outlawed, the continued demand for workers created indentured labour. This produced large bodies of people from poor areas of India, China (and others) to the West Indies, Malaya, Fiji, Eastern and Southern Africa, and Southeast Asia etc.

Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia defines 'diaspora' as "the dispersion of Jews among the Gentiles after the Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.) or the aggregate of Jews outside Palestine or present day Israel. The term also carries religious, philosophical, political and eschatological connotations, in as much as the land of Israel and themselves."

Columbia Encyclopaedia also refers to it as, "term used today to denote the Jewish communities living outside the Holy Land. It was originally used to designate the dispersal of the Jews at the time of the destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.) and forced exile to Babylonia. The diaspora became a permanent feature of the Jewish life."

Stuart Hall says, "diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference." According to Hall, diaspora experience "is defined, not by the essence or purity but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, differences; by hybridity." ²

The 1989 *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the etymology of the word 'Diaspora' back to its Greek root and to its appearance in the Old Testament

(Deut. 28:25).”And it considers the word as a reference to “God’s intentions for the people of Israel to be ‘dispersed’ across the world”.³ In the 1993 edition, “Diaspora” is defined as referring to “any body of people living outside their traditional homeland” revising the former definition of the term as exclusively applicable to Israelis or Jews. And *The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (1995) defines Diaspora as “the process by which people of a particular nation become scattered and settle in other countries, especially (the Diaspora) the Jews who left ancient Palestine in this way”. The obsession with the classical case of the Israeli Diaspora and the identification of the word as representative of an immigrant community and its process of formation which the above definitions show point to the need of distinguishing between these meanings for a fruitful discussion.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (1998) define diaspora as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions ...” . And they use the term in the context of Western or European colonization. Their definition seems to be especially remodeled for colonial and post – colonial contexts. A historian by the name Sathis Georgouris showed a similar emphasis to the constant, mobility, in his research article *The Concept of Diaspora in the Contemporary World*. He argues that historically Diasporas are the results of migration, whatever the case. And because they don’t have to be bounded by the economic, political, historical etc., limits of any state, they are always on the move seeking better gains as entrepreneurs. And it is this historical mobility and the ability to surpass the institutional operatives of capitalism that made them economically successful “diasporic entrepreneurial networks”. And this made them to stick together and form “the articulate image of social – ethnic cohesion”⁴.

Georgouris concludes asserting that diasporic communities should not be viewed as traces of a national community but rather as results of their own dispersal or mobility under specific historical conditions (political, economic, sociological, psychological, cultural). Accordingly not every

immigrant community is truly Diaspora except those who share a strong ancestral center and linkage with each other in their movements in the hostlands. Georgouris gives as examples Jews, Greeks, and Armenian failing to extend his analysis outside Europe.

According to Homi Bhabha diasporas are “gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues or in the uncanny fluency of author’s language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment of other world lived restoratively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.”⁵ Bhabha thinks that the in-between (third) space occupied by the diasporic subject is pregnant with creative possibilities. Salman Rushdie and Edward Said also visualize higher creative potentialities in the condition of exile.

Autar Brah believes that “Diaspora space is the intersectionality of Diaspora, border and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed.”⁶

Vijay Mishra says that, “Diasporic epistemology locates itself squarely in the realm of the hybrid, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes.”⁷

Mexican-American author Gloria Anzaldua writes of the emergence of a new consciousness that she calls mestiza consciousness. La mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of group to another. The mestiz faces the dilemma of a mixed breed. She writes, “Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, and inner war.”⁷ Anzaldua says that the new mestiza must develop tolerance for contradictions and ambiguities and in doing so, she develops

new creative possibilities. She further states, “The focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposite powers. In attempting to work out syntheses, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. The third element is a new consciousness- a mestiza consciousness and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion. That keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.”⁸

After the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and rapid globalization in world economy, diasporas are now known as “exemplary communities of the transnational moment.” Safran tried for the first time to manage the proliferation of the use of the term ‘Diaspora’. He tried to set the criteria in order to build typography. His criteria underlined the attachment of diasporas to their place of origin which through their collective memory and mythology is defined as their homeland. At the same time, these communities grow a feeling of rejection in their host country which results in the increase of their desire for return to the homeland. This return becomes and almost metaphysical destiny for them that contributes to the development of personal as well as official ties with the homeland. The etymological analysis of ‘diaspora’ revealed and embedded dual metaphor between roots/routes.

Clifford considers ‘Diasporas’ as a new form of consciousness, collectivity and solidarity in a period that fragmentation and deterritorialization are praised as dominant paradigms. Diasporic groups often find recourse to a discourse of nostalgia praising difference. They construct relations to transnational political, cultural or religious movements that try to overcome the national boundaries. Clifford invests too much in the hybrid and deterritorial trait of the Diasporas. The double consciousness (here and there) attributed to the diasporic communities is presented as a

general characteristic that endows them with freedom from boundedness and other constraints of nation states.

Daniel. J. Elazar regarded Diasporas as ethno religious communities which as a catalytic minority would influence the host society. Esman defined Diaspora as a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with the land of its origin. Toloyan who launched a journal *Diaspora* stated,

“We use diaspora provisionally to indicate our belief that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community’⁹

Another European scholar, Dr. Myria Georgiou, defines Diaspora as “an intermediate concept between the local and the global that nevertheless transcends the national perspectives” quoting Gillespie. And it implies...” a decentralized relation to ethnicity, real imagined relations between scattered people who sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication and contact and who do not necessarily depend on returning to a distant Homeland.”

Beyond dualisms and socio- historical constructs-outside the nation-ethnicity becomes too frail to hold on t. and the nation is no longer limited in its geographical boundaries. Its dispersed people interact whether in reality or in imagination and sustain a disproric community. An article entitled *Diasporas; some conceptual Consideration* by Fred W. Riggs defines Diaspora as “Communities whose members live informally outside a homeland while maintaining active contacts with it.”¹⁰. The word ‘informally’ excludes people having a formal status such as “soldiers, diplomats, missionaries, businessmen, journalist, spies etc” who are agents of the state or non-state entities in the homeland. The other criterion ‘active’ refers to the

maintenance of interactive relationship (ibid). But maintenance of contact in the homeland may exclude latent diasporans with the potential to be active.

Conceptually “Diaspora highlights the existence of transnational networks of people and their sense of belonging in communities beyond spatial boundaries”. It also implies that this sense of belonging is not only connected with experiencing migration but “might have an on-going importance for younger generations who have not experienced migration processes”. In addition diaspora implies that certain cultures continue to “survive, transform and remain relevant” even after the owners of the culture get physically dislocated from their homeland. In general diaspora specific to minorities who sometime in history migrated and have a deep connection with a distant homeland are different from indigenous minorities due to “the direct or the symbolic and historical experience of migration and or deterritorialisation”.

Safran (1991) proposes that “the concept of diaspora be applied to expatriate minority community whose members share several of the following characteristics”. Safran’s characteristics are summarized as follows.

- Dispersal from an original center to peripheral regions, (Dispersal)
- Perpetuated myth of the homeland (myth)
- Sense of alienation in their host lands (alienation)
- Idealization of their homeland as a place to which they will return (idealization)
- Commitment to maintain or restore their homeland (commitment)
- Relationships with the homeland whose existence supports their own ethno communal consciousness and solidarity (interaction with homeland) ¹¹

In general, the theories and concepts of Diaspora define the Diaspora as a community dispersed from an original homeland residing in a host land and maintaining a real or imaginary connection with the homeland. As a concept, it is the condition of existing dislocated from the social-historical constructs like nation, race, ethnicity, culture etc., which define oneself at a different location having its own constructs and the resultant effects and features of the subject individual or community.

Origin and development of the term 'Diaspora'

Chronologically speaking, the first mention of a diaspora created as a result of exile is found in the Septuagint in a phrase that meant "thou shalt be dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth." When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the word "Diaspora" was used to refer to the population of Jews exiled from Israel in 607 B.C. by the Babylonians, and from Judea in 70 B.C. by the Roman Empire. It subsequently came to be used to refer to the historical movements of the dispersed ethnic population of Israel, the cultural development of that population or the population itself. The capitalized word 'Diaspora' refers to the Jewish diaspora and the uncapitalized word 'diaspora' may be used to refer to refugee populations of other origins or ethnicities. .

The wider application of diaspora evolved from the Assyrian two-way mass deportation policy of conquered populations to deny future territorial claims to these populations. In Ancient Greece, the term 'diaspora' meant "the scattered" and it was employed to refer to the citizens of a dominant city-state who immigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire.

The first recorded usage of the word 'diaspora' in English language was in 1876 referring to refugees of the Irish famine. The term was widely assimilated by the mid 1950s, with long-term expatriates in significant numbers from other particular countries like England, USA and so on.

In all cases, the term 'diaspora' carries a sense of displacement and the population so described finds itself separated from its national territory. Its people have a hope or a desire to return to their homeland at some point. Some writers have noted that diaspora may result in a loss of nostalgia for a single home as people "re-root" in a series of meaningful displacements. In this sense, they may have multiple homes and maintain some kind of attachment to each. Diasporic cultural development often assumes a different course from that of the population in the original home-land. With the passage of time, these separated communities tend to vary in culture, traditions, language and other factors.

Diaspora's original connotations of dispersion and exile now encompass a larger semantic field. It is sometimes used to refer to a range of ethnic communities and to a variety of categories of people like political and war refugees, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities etc. Definition and understandings of diaspora get modified 'in translation' as they are applied to new groups of people.

Characteristics of Diaspora:

There are three core elements that are widely understood to be constitutive of Diaspora. Some subset or combination of these underlies most of the important definitions and discussions of diaspora. The first is dispersion in space; the second, orientation to a homeland and the third, boundary maintenance.

I. Dispersion:

This is the most widely accepted criterion of diaspora. It can be interpreted strictly as forced or otherwise traumatic dispersion; more broadly as any kind of dispersion in space, provided that the dispersion crosses state borders. More broadly still, the dispersion defining diasporas includes 'ethnic communities divided by state frontiers' or 'that segment of people living outside the homeland. This allows even compactly settled populations to

count as diasporas when part of the population lives as a minority outside its ethno national homeland.

II. Homeland Orientation:

The second constitutive criterion of diaspora is orientation to a real or imagined homeland as a source of value, identity and loyalty. In recent discussions, there is a shift in this regard. Earlier, this criterion was strongly emphasized. Four of the six criteria specified by Safran (1991) concern the orientation to as homeland. These include maintaining a collective memory or myth about the homeland; regarding the ancestral home as the true and ideal home to which one would eventually return; being collectively committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and its safety and prosperity and finally continuing to relate personally and vicariously to the homeland in a way that shapes one's identity and solidarity.

Recent discussion deemphasizes homeland orientation. Clifford, for example, has criticized what he called the 'centred' model of Safran and others. Clifford notes that many aspects of the Jewish experience itself do not qualify. For example, even the South Asian diaspora is not so much oriented to roots in a specific place or a desire for return to homeland. For Clifford, decentered, lateral connections are as important as those formed around teleology of origin/return.

III. Boundary Maintenance:

The third constitutive element involves the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society. The mobilized diaspora for centuries has constituted a separate society or quasi-society in a larger polity. Boundaries are maintained by deliberate resistance to assimilation through self-segregation. On most accounts, boundary maintenance is an indispensable

criterion of diaspora. It is this that enables one to speak of a Diaspora as a distinctive community held-together by active solidarity as well as by dense social relationships. And yet, there is an interesting ambivalence in the literature. Though boundary-maintenance and preservation of identity are generally emphasized, there is a strong cross-current that emphasizes hybridity, fluidity, creolization, and syncretism. As Hall puts it, “the diasporic experience is defined, not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity or diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”¹² Thus, there is a tension in the literature between boundary maintenance and boundary erosion.

In modern times, terms like trans-nationalism, post-nationalism, globalization, deterritorialization, post-colonialism, trans-culturalism and post-modernity are in vogue. They mark an epochal shift in our understanding of the term diaspora. It can be said that the world has now passed from the age of the nation-state to the age of diaspora. What Anthony Giddens tells about the term ‘globalization’ could be said equally aptly of ‘Diaspora’; ‘It has come from nowhere to be almost to be almost everywhere.’ Martin Heidegger has rightly said in his ‘Letter on Humanism’ “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.”¹³

The unprecedented porosity of borders, the unprecedented circulation of people, goods, messages, images, ideas and cultural products signify a basic realignment of the relationships between politics and culture, territorial states and de-territorialized identities. Diasporas are treated as ‘bona fide actual entities’ and cast as unitary actors. Sheffer distinguished ‘core’ ‘marginal’ and ‘dormant members of Diasporas’. Diaspora as a term can be seen as an idiom, a stance of a claim. As a category of practice, diaspora is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties and as a stance it is a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of population.

According to Gilroy, "Diaspora is a valuable idea because it is an alternative to the metaphysics of 'race', nation and bonded culture coded into body."¹⁴ He puts emphasis on contingency, indeterminacy and conflict. Gilroy in his book 'The Black Atlantic' (1993) has presented the most sustained theoretical defence of the concept of Diaspora. He reconstructs the history of the West through the work of black intellectuals like Du Bois and Richard Wright.

Cohen's typology of Diaspora:-

Robin Cohen's recent project on Global Diasporas presents very interesting ideas on the ways or rethinking the issue of movements of population and new forms of ethnic organization. He provides an important corrective approach to ethnic and national boundaries that treat them in relation to fixed territorial and political boundaries. His views focus on the trajectories of migration and settlement and the reconfiguration of ethnic solidarities.¹⁵

Groups called 'Diasporas' travel across territories for various reasons. The essential element here is spreading of people from their original homeland. Cohen refers to homeland in metaphysic sense rather than territorial. The group need not be identified with a nation state but it must constitute itself as a population category, usually a nation or ethnic group for Cohen, the central ideas behind 'Diaspora' is found in the forcible scattering of people as denoted in *the Book of Deuteronomy* subsequent definitions have related to the Jewish dispersion to Babylon. The African Diaspora has also taken up this ter. Armenians, Greeks, Africans and Jews form the traditional or classic diasporas. Cohen seeks to retain the objectivist definition found in classical notion of Diaspora but also shows openness to modern or global aspects resulting from mass movements of population and the slow decline of the nation state.

Cohen lists the following criteria for allowing the term Diaspora to be used for a group of people.

- Dispersal and scattering.
- Collective trauma.
- Cultural flowering
- Troubled relationship with the majority
- A sense of community transcending national frontiers.
- Promoting a return movement.

Cohen suggests that the old diasporic practice of sojourning has become a feature of the new global economy. The former emphasis on the binary process of 'travel from' and 'return to' are no longer useful and valid. Cohen's typology constructs five different forms of diasporic community. They are

- Victim Diaspora
- Labor Diaspora
- Trade Diaspora
- Imperial Diaspora
- Cultural Diaspora

Cohen acknowledges that some of these forms mingle and overlap one another. They may take dual or multiple forms or change their characteristics over time. His examples are drawn from the experience of Jews as the prototype form. According to Cohen, Africans and Armenians are Victim Diasporas; Indians are labour; British as Imperial; Chinese and Lebanese are trading; and Caribbean are cultural.

Typologies may function as heuristic devices. Weber's ideal type has a number of analytical uses particularly for the purpose of comparison. Cohen's typology is descriptive and inductivist. He relies mainly on the origin

or intentionality of dispersal. In some cases, it refers to occupational patterning e.g. labour, trading. In others, it is an experience of forceful or violent displacement e.g. victim or penetration (imperial), in yet others, it is the development of a particular syntheses of cultural elements (the cultural). In order to differentiate, Cohen presents Diaspora as a unitary sociological phenomenon which is divided into different types.

Diaspora formulates a population as a transnational community. Cohen suggests that the sense of unease or difference faced by members of diasporic groups causes them to identify with co-ethnics in other countries. The idea of primordial bonding seems to lie at the bottom of the notion of diaspora. Cohen acknowledges that there might be different factors that give rise to the diasporic movement for different groups. Within these groups also, there might be different pull/push factors at different times and for different destinations. For example, among the Greek diaspora, there are several factors like asylum, forceful expulsion or exile, trading/labor migration and brain drain for different categories. The idea of diaspora tends to homogenize the population referred to at the transnational level. However, such populations are not homogenous as these populations may have migrated to different countries for different reasons. Diasporas are not homogeneous in another sense also. They may have formed different collective representations of the group under local conditions. They may develop different ethnic cultural organizations and promote their ethnic identity. Different groups within the overall category will have different political projects with different gender, class and political affiliations.

The postmodern versions of diaspora (Hall 1990, Gilroy, 1993, Clifford, 1994, Brah, 1996) denote a condition rather than being descriptive of a group. The post-modern version of diaspora denotes a process at the holistic level and not just in terms of the group of intergroup relations. The diaspora process is originally related to globalization and cultural mixing. Such processes involve transnational and trans-ethnic mixing. The diasporic process is one whereby social unities round nation become destabilized.

According to Clifford, nation-state is subverted by diasporic attachments which construct allegiances elsewhere. The diaspora claims to belongingness do not come from claims to inhabit original territory it may be different territory than their constructed and deferred homeland. Clifford suggests that Diaspora think globally but live locally.

The present perception of Diasporas is breaking the ethnic spectacles and underestimates the continuing attachment to the idea of ethnic bonds. There are certain common features in Cohen's and Clifford's approaches in spite of significant differences. The orientation to a symbolic homeland is a key feature for defining Diaspora. Diasporic forms flourish in today's globalised world. They come out as strong social organizations. Clifford's view challenges ethnicity and ethnic absolutism. According to him, ethnicity is replaced by hybridity. Cultural hybridity replaced the concepts like ethnicity, nationality, nationhood, boundaries and identity. The post-modern concept of diaspora helps us in understanding migration, post-migration, reterritorialization and multiple sense of belonging and loyalties of the people beyond boundaries of nations. Dr. Myria Geogiou (2001) in the article *Thinking Diaspora; Why Diaspora is a key concept for understanding Multicultural Europe* describes diasporization central to the understanding of the contemporary world.

Diaspora today illustrates the hybrid and ever-changing nature of identities that are no more dependent on homogeneity, purity and stable localization. Cultural viability does not depend on purity, but rather through mixing. There is a diversity of cultures in the Diasporas that co-exist, merge and remerge through hybridity. The cultures of Diaspora can be the results of cultural meetings or of suppression, exclusion and domination and yet the diasporic cultures are neither original pure or new impure. Geogiou suggests that post-modern world can be described by hybridized identity and culture. The concept of diaspora becomes the best way of understanding the present day world in which the concept of ethnicity is rapidly fading. Geogiou argues that diaspora is not a panacea and it should not be taken

as the only useful concept for understanding cultural hybridity. Its value lies in the fact that it adds to the concepts of migration and ethnicity. It emphasizes that communities can extend beyond nation boundaries.

Diaspora as a special form:

Martin Baumann indicates three different referential points related to Diaspora (a) the process of becoming scattered

(b) the community living in foreign parts and

(c) geographic space in which they live.

These traits are related to diaspora as a social form. In the context of social relationships, diasporas can be seen as those created as a result of voluntary or forced migration from one place (home) to at least two other countries. They must be maintaining collective identity often through ethnic myth of common origin and historical experience. They institutionalize networks of exchange and communication that transcend territorial states and create new communal organizations. These groups maintain variety of explicit and implicit ties with their homelands and develop solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement. They are unable or unwilling to be fully accepted by 'host society' and therefore they experience a sense of alienation or exclusion or superiority or other kind of difference.

Diasporic people are often confronted with divided loyalties to homeland and host countries. The collective groups of Diasporas often act as powerful pressure groups in the domestic politics of the host countries as well as in the international political arena. The homeland political orientations of South Asian religious groups are quite strong and deterritorialization is often at the core of a variety of global fundamentalism. Appadurai has cited

the example of the movement for the establishment of Khalistan as 'an invented homeland of the deterritorialized Sikh population of England, Canada and United States. Right-wing religious organizations in the homeland are known to have received much support from overseas populations.

The economic strategies of transnational groups represent an important new source and force in international finance and commerce. The economic achievements of certain diasporic groups are seen to result from the mutual pooling of resources, transfer of credit, investment of capital and so on. The Government of India enacted measures to attract intellectual and financial resources of non-Resident Indians. Some state governments like Gujarat, West Bengal, and Maharashtra have tried to woo NRIs through incentives and special concessions. Gujarati Hindus support religious organizations financially through endowments and funds. Thus political and economic links support the idea of 'triadic relationships-homeland, place of settlement and everywhere in Diaspora among South Asian religions.

Diaspora as mode of cultural production:

Diaspora is also described as involving the production and reproduction of social and cultural phenomena. The constant flow of goods and activities are involved in relationships among people. These social relations take on meaning within the flow and fabric of daily life. With reference to questions of globalization, and interest in diaspora has been equated with the anti-essentialist, constructivist approach to ethnicity. The words like 'syncretic', 'creolized', 'crossover', 'hybrid' and 'alternative' are used for these production and reproduction of forms. Stuart Hall offers important insights regarding Diaspora, ethnicity and identity. He says,

"Diaspora does not refer as to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other peoples into the sea. This is the old, the imperializing, and the hegemonizing form of ethnicity. The Diaspora

experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity. But by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves and through transformation and difference.”

Global media and communications play a very vital role in the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of diasporic identity. Gayatri Spivak also highlights ‘the discourse of cultural specificity and difference, packaged for transnational consumption through global technologies, particularly through the medium of ‘microelectronic’ transnationalism represented by electronic bulletin boards and Internet.

The examination of media and communications in the South Asian religious diaspora is comparatively new. In this field, Maria Gillespie has produced a most valuable ethnographic study of the role of transnational television and film in the formation and transformation of identity among young Punjabi Londoners. The connections and relations are strengthened by modern communication systems which have augmented a sense of diasporic awareness among the Punjabi families in South hall. These connections may be as symbolic links between viewers of the same blockbuster Bombay movies and home videos of weddings. While watching episodes of the mythological and religious TV serials, Hindus in Britain and the USA may light incense and perform devout salutation when a deity appears on the TV screen. In the same manner, casual surf of the internet reveals hundreds of home pages and hyper text links to sites designated to the world wide maintenance and propagation of South Asian religious.

Post-modernity and Diaspora:

Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) writes,

“Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’ for which there seems to be no proper name

other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post' post-modernism, post colonialism, post-feminism..."¹⁶

Bhabha suggests that the concepts of binary oppositions like black/white, self/other, majority/minority, present/past/future etc are no more sufficient enough to describe our age. The post-modern era is what he calls 'beyond.' This is the reality of the multicultural post modern society whose identity, culture and history are mixed up. He seems to suggest that the post-modern artists should show the displaced unstable existence of our times beyond the temporal limits of past, present and future and polarities like black/white, majority/minority and so on. The terms post-modernity, post-coloniality, post- feminism do not suggest 'after' or 'anti' but they insistently gesture to the beyond. They suggest going beyond time, polarities and categorizations of the modern and colonial...in between.

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presenting" just like "the beyond". Bhabha argues that there is no homogeneous nation or organic ethnic community for there are always minorities ignored. He argues that all imagined communities are hybridized and multicultural.

Bhabha in *The Location of culture* uses a new term 'Dissemi Nation' with 'N' Capitalized to indicate that it is not merely an individual immigrant that gets dispersed or dislocated but the socio-historical construct 'Nation' too. In the chapter 'Dissemi Nation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation' in '*The Location of Culture*' , he describes location as the concept of identity not limited by geographical limits but something that is constituted regardless of the specific location.

Bhabha questions the idea of nation and nationalism exposing its instability. He says that nation is only a historical construction and what existed or exists is only nation less. According to him, the immigrants, the minorities and the diasporic gather in the cities to change the history; of the

nation. Bhabha describes the situation of the Diasporic as a time of gathering which includes the gatherings of exiles, émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering in the half light of foreign tongues or in the uncanny fluency of another's language. The conception of the nation as a cultural identity which historicism advocates is refuted by the situation of the migrant. The immigrant often falls into hybridity and becomes a stranger of his own country language and identity. Bhabha, thus, debunks the historicist concept of the nation and focuses on the temporality of the location of culture. In short, dissemiNation is a concept that emphasizes the temporality of culture as opposed to its historical originality and primordiality. It describes the condition of the immigrants who are ripped off from their motherland and not fitting in the foreign cultures of the host countries. For Bhabha, the Diasporas are 'unhomed'.

Displacement:

Displacement is a concept that refers to the crisis of identity. The crisis of identity can result from migration, enslavement, voluntary migration for better life. It may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious or unconscious oppression of the indigenous people and culture by a superior racial or cultural model. The displacement creates 'alienation of vision and the crisis in self image in the displaced. It often leads to a stubborn assertion of 'the myths of identity' in the literature of the displaced. It can also lead to linguistic alienation resulting from the drowning of one's culture under the domination of the other culture. This has led in Africa to 'the alienation of the state from the actual society.' This is the reason why immigrants form their own Diaspora communities in the host nation. The geographic and climatic conditions of the host country also create a sense of otherness in the migrants.

Exile is one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern for place and displacement in societies home and abroad. It is a sense of loss and

displacement from a traditional homeland. It can occur in homeland due to modernization which can cut off a person from his traditional language, way of life, religion, tribal practices and so on. It occurs inevitably in a foreign land where everything is at odds with one's tradition, culture and language. In such cases, exile brings about homelessness, displacement and nostalgia on its subjects. Exile involves the sense of punishment one has to undergo that is, to be away from one's home and to explicitly refused permission to return home. It is common to distinguish between internal exile, i.e. forced resettlement within the country of residence and external exile, deportation from one's homeland. Self-exile is often practiced as a form of protest or to avoid persecution.

The Uruguayan writer Vinar (1990) presents his own experience of living in exile and his choice of repatriation. He suggests the importance of memory and personal biography in the choices that people make. The multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through the experience of living in, remembering and imagining them go beyond the mere idea of place of birth. Drawing on psychoanalysis, he explains the attachment or sense of belonging to a nation, using Freud's concept of 'tracing' (or memory sketch), in which memory of body and senses comes first, followed by memories of cultural specificity such as history, ideals, music, landscape and national symbols. Vinar concludes that belonging to a nationality, which includes a linguistic community, history and culture is inherent in today's human condition.

Hybridity:

Post-modern theories no longer describe to pure ancestry. Hybridity as a reality and theme in post-modern literature was seen as a threat to identity and ancestry. In the post modern world, cultural encounters are taking place on equal terms as a mutual acceptance of differences. Recent approaches have acknowledged and accepted the strength of hybridized and syncretic view of the world.

Acculturation can be defined as a change resulting from direct contact between two cultures or cultural groups. There are four strategies of acculturation; the first is 'assimilation' which can be defined as "the relinquishing of one's own ethnic identity and adopting that of the dominant society." According to Al-Issa, the American melting pot concept refers to 'assimilation'. The second strategy is 'integration' i.e. incorporation of part of the other culture while maintaining one's own cultural identity.¹⁷

The third strategy is 'separation', when the ethnic group withdraws from the larger society. Segregation is the example of separation. 'Marginalization' is that in which the group or individual loses contact with its own culture as well as the culture of the majority and is usually characterized by alienation and loss of identity. The experience of acculturation involves stress anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation.

Immigrants often suffer from discrimination and prejudices under host society. They become targets of prejudice and discrimination on account of various psychological factors that affect them and the host society. These include group favoritism towards one's group; competition for positive social identity; social influences like those of mass media, schools, parents, peer groups etc; social structural differences (e.g. class differences); displaced hostility or projection of frustration from a powerful body to the powerless minority; authoritarian personality; differences in socio-cultural norms etc.

According to Allport (1954), there are two types of psychological effect of discrimination or victimization-

1. Blaming oneself (withdrawal, self-hate, aggression against one's own group)

2. Blaming others (fighting back, suspicion, increased group pride etc.)

Pettigrew (1964) has made slightly different categorization of response to discrimination and victimization. They are of three types:

- Moving towards the oppressor by seeking acceptance through integration.

- Moving against the oppressor by fighting back.
- Moving away from the oppressor through withdrawal, flight or avoidance.

The domination of the Third World by the Westerners made them feel that their knowledge of science and Christianity put them above others. This resulted in stigmatization of the non-Western. In spite of modern development in human right laws, the world has failed to eliminate discrimination and racial prejudices. When prejudice continues to exist in more subtle and indirect form instead of overtly expressed against minorities, it is referred to as aversive racism. Aversive racism is rather far difficult to deal with and combat. This new kind of racism tends to hide behind the legal system and it is often rationalized by some Western democratic or Christian principles. If attention is not paid to the factors associated with prejudice, discrimination and aversive racism, social and racial harmony among the ethnic groups in Western multicultural society would never take place.

In the USA, immigrants are generally not favoured by native whites and African Americans because their immigration is believed to have negative effects on their lives. Media also play negative role in aggravating prejudices against minorities by giving biased coverage about the minority groups. One of the media through which negative impression about the minorities can be reduced is literature. Novels, poems, dramas, short stories and films by and about the immigrant minority groups can help counteract the perception of all minorities as others, making them respected as humans. It can also help the minorities to gain confidence and shake off their inferiority complexes. Diaspora literature is the literature of the migrants expressing their experiences and sense of displacement and loss of social constructs like nation, ethnicity, race, culture, language etc. It also expresses their identity crisis, sense of alienation, nostalgia, loss and emptiness. The diasporans lose the unique bond those members of the same race, nation and ethnic group share. They experience social isolation, culture shock and stress. Therefore, in diasporic literature, we come across the themes of

emptiness, frustration, disillusionment, home-sickness and racism and discrimination.

History of the Diaspora (origin and development) :

The development of diaspora through the various stages of its history substantiates the ripening of the diaspora into the very condition of culture. The history of diaspora can be broadly divided into three phases leading to the postmodernist diaspora, namely: ancient diaspora, medieval diaspora and the modern diaspora. The first mention of created as a result of exile is found in Septuagint in the Hebrew Bible. Its use began to develop from its original sense when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. The first recorded usage of the word 'Diaspora' in English language was used in 1876 for the refugees of the Irish famine. The term became widely assimilated in English by the mid 1950s with long –term expatriates being referred as a diaspora. In all cases, the term diaspora carries a sense of displacement and the population so described finds itself separated from its homeland for whatever reason.

European history contains numerous Diaspora-like events. In ancient times in 6th century B.C. the trading and colonizing activities of the Greek tribes from the Balkans and Asia Minor spread Greek culture, religion and language around the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins. They established Greek city states I Sicily, Southern Italy, northern Libya, eastern Spain, the South of France and the Black Sea coasts. Greeks founded more than 400 colonies. Alexander the Great's conquest of the Archaemenid Empire marked the beginning of the Hellenistic period which was characterized by the Greek colonization in Asia and Africa.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus reached America after which European exploration and colonization rapidly expanded. In the 6th century, around 2, 40,000 Europeans entered American ports. Immigration continued to North and South America. In 19th century alone over 50 million people left Europe for America.

In 19th century 45% to 85% of the population of Ireland immigrated to countries like Britain, the United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand because of 'Great Hunger' of the Irish Famine. It is estimated that the size of the population that immigrated to various countries from Ireland was around 80 to 100 million. Another example of pre-modern Diaspora is African Diaspora which began at the beginning of the 16th century. During the Atlantic Slave Trade, around 9.4 to 12 million people from West, West-central and South-East Africa were taken to the Western hemisphere as slaves. This population and their descendants were major influences on the culture of English, French, Portuguese and Spanish New World Colonies.

Asian Diaspora constitutes one of the largest among the Diasporas. Chinese immigration first occurred thousands of years ago. The mass emigration that took place from the 19th century to 1949 was caused by wars and starvation in China. Most immigrants that migrated from China were poor, less educated peasants and coolies. They immigrated to developing countries such as the USA, Australia, South Africa Southeast Asia, Malaya and other places. The largest Asian Diaspora outside of Southeast Asia is that of the Indian Diaspora. The overseas Indian community, estimated over 25 million is spread across many parts of the world almost in every continent. It constitutes a diverse, heterogeneous and eclectic global community representing different languages, religions, cultures etc. The common thread that binds them together is the idea of India and its intrinsic values.

20th century witnessed huge population movements often by government actions. For example, Stalin shipped millions of people to Eastern Russia, central Asia and Siberia both as punishment and to stimulate development of the frontiers regions. Other Diasporas were created as a consequence of political decisions such as the end of colonialisms. During the World War Second, Nazi Germany departed and killed millions of Jews. Some Jews fled to Western Europe and America

before borders were closed. Later other Eastern Europe refugees moved West, away from Soviet annexation and the Iron curtain regimes after the Second World War. The Soviet Union and Communist controlled Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia expelled thousands of ethnic Germans. Most of them moved to the West including Western Europe and many of them sought refuge in the United States.

After World War Second, Israel was created and there was a series of uprisings against colonialist rule. The Middle East nations became hostile to historic Jewish populations that emigrated and resettled in Israel. During the war to establish Israel in 1948, the Palestinian Diaspora were displaced and emigrated from their former territory. Arab-Israeli war in 1967 added to the number of Palestinian Diaspora that continued to live in refugee camps maintained by Middle Eastern nations. In 1947 partition resulted in the migration of millions of people between India and Pakistan. Millions were murdered in the ethnic violence of the period. It is estimated that around 10 million people became the victim of bloodshed and communal violence. India and Pakistan became free in 1947 and thousands of former subjects of the British Raj went to UK from the Indian subcontinent.

During the cold-war era huge populations of refugees migrated from then developing countries. US-USSR cold war created huge number of global Diasporas. In South East Asia, many Vietnamese people migrated to France and later to the US, Australia and Canada after the cold war related Vietnam War. The Afghan Diaspora resulted in 1979 Iranian Revolution following the fall of the Shah. Unrest in Iraq pushed Assyrians into exile. Uganda in Africa expelled 80,000 South Asians in 1974 and seized their businesses and properties. Hundreds of thousands of people fled from the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 into neighboring countries. Thousands of refugees in Zimbabwe moved to South Africa. The long war in Congo also created millions of refugees. Millions of Iraqis fled conflict in their nation since 2003, the beginning of the US occupation Iraq.

Migration Diasporas:

Some scholars argue that people migrate to other countries for economic reasons and form an effective Diaspora. In the USA, there are such migrants as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban-Americans and so on. Elsewhere, Turkish have migrated to Germany, South Asians in the Persian Gulf, Filipinos worldwide and Chinese workers in Japan. The International Organization for Migration said that there are 200 million migrants around the world today. Europe hosted the largest number of immigrants with 70.6 million people in 2005. North America with over 45.1 million immigrants is second followed by Asia which nearly hosts 25.3 million. Most of today's migrant workers come from Asia.

During the 19th century, abolition of slavery in the European countries of the Western hemisphere created a need for a new source of labour. In areas where land was scarce such as Caribbean Islands, newly freed slaves were forced back to work on plantations. In the areas where land was plentiful, such as Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad, former slaves took up independent farming. Most labourers came from North Central and North-Eastern India. Sizable minority also came from Tamil and Telugu speaking regions of the South. Some Tamils migrated to Sri Lanka to work on tea plantations. South Asians went to Malaya, then a British colony. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Indians migrated to Myanmar to work on the plantations or to perform menial jobs. In general, South Asians who migrated to British East Africa were neither indentured nor contract labourers. They came initially to build railways and stayed as low ranking civil servants, Shop-keepers and professionals. Many of these immigrants came from Gujarat, Punjab and Goa.

In the 20th century while some South Asians continued to immigrate to communities that had been established in the 19th century Diaspora, other struck out for new destinations, the U.S., Canada, the UK and European countries and later Australia, and the Middle East, Immigration to the US and European countries and later Australia, and the Middle East. Immigration to the US came in two waves, the first from 1907 to 1924 and the second much

large wave, starting in 1965 continuing to the present day. The first wave consisted mostly of Sikhs from Punjab and Muslims. In 1965 with the Immigration and Nationality Reform Act marked the beginning of the second wave of immigration and by 1990 nearly one million South Asians had immigrated to the US. A large percentage of South Asians in the second wave were professionals. At present, the currently the largest concentration of immigrants and Americans of South Asian descent is in California and New York.

South Asian immigration to Canada began at the start of the 20th century. In Canada, the most of immigrants are from the Punjab. By 1908, there were around 5000 south Asians. Due to strict regulations related to immigration, between 1909 and 1943, only 878 Asian were allowed to enter Canada. After World War Second, restrictions were gradually loosened and immigration laws were liberalized. After 1962, there was a significant influx of Sikhs from Punjab, Hindus from Gujarat, Mumbai and Delhi, Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Christians from Kerala, Parsis from Mumbai and Buddhists from Srilanka. By 1990's, South Asians in Canada became quite prosperous and well-educated minority.

Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis began to come to UK as factory workers in the 1950s and 1960s. They faced hostile attitude of the working class Britons and tended to concentrate in urban ghetto neighborhoods. By mid-1980's South Asian composed more than half the non-white population in the UK. Some South Asians also settled in Australia and other European countries.

Indians Diaspora is the third largest Diaspora, next only to the British and the Chinese in that order. Indians or the people of Indian origin are found in all continents. In Mauritius, the people of Indian origin are the single largest community (60.69%), in Guyana 51.93, in Fiji 41.31, Trinidad and Tobago 38.63, Surinam 36.04%, UAE 32%, Qatar 24%, Bahrain 20%, Oman 15%, Kuwait 13%, Malaysia 7.26%, Saudi Arabia 7%, Srilanka 6.28%, Singapore 5.4% and Myanmar 5.26%.

The Indian diaspora today constitutes an important and in some respects unique force in world culture. The origins of the modern Indian diaspora lie mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation into the British Empire. Indians were taken over as indentured labour to far-flung parts of the empires in the 19th century like Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Malaysia, South Africa, Srilanka etc. Over two million Indian men fought on behalf of the British Empire in various wars, including the Boer war and the two World Wars. Some remained behind to claim the land on which they had fought. Gujarati traders in large number left for East Africa in the early part of the 20th century. Finally, in Post-Second World War period, the dispersal of Indian labour and professionals has been a world-wide phenomenon. In spite of diversity, the Indian community has certain common traits. However unlike Indian communities across the world might be, they all maintain some sort of tenuous link with the motherland. Certain customs and traditions bind Indians together to some extent. Religious festivals, rituals, arranged marriages, food and Hindi movies and music are some of the major binding forces. The newspapers published by Indians carry a section of matrimonial advertisements. These advertisements help Indians to locate one another. The religious practices of the Hindus, Shikhs and Muslims in the US and other countries show that they are often more desperately committed to their religious practices and faiths. They even show the signs of susceptibility to a resurgent and militant Hinduism, militant Shikhism, and militant Islam and so on.

Indian diaspora constitutes a historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian subcontinent in other parts of the world. The formation of Indian diaspora is one of the most significant demographic dislocations of modern times. They can be classified as the 'sugar' and the 'masala' diaspora. Sudesh Mishra classifies Diasporas in the following words:

“There is a distinction to be made between the old and the new diasporas. The distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi voluntary flight of the indentured peasants to non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji,

Trinidad, Mauritius, Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and on the other hand the late capital or post modern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centers such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain.”¹⁸

Other critics call these diasporas ‘Forced Diasporas’ and ‘Voluntary Diaspora’. Vinay Lal calls it ‘diaspora of labour’ and ‘diaspora of longing’. In majority of the older diasporic writers, there is a sense of an unease generated by dislocation and deracination. V.S.Naipaul, originally a third generation of immigrants who moved to Trinidad, always expressed a sense of unease, the question of inheritance and homelessness. The idea of home as an ambivalent location shows that identities are fixed but keep on changing in case of diasporas quite often. New diasporas have relocated themselves in such a way that borders and boundaries have been confounded. In case of Indian diaspora writers, there are three visible divisions. The first category is that of a writer like Bharti Mukherjee who detests the idea of being called immigrant writer. She likes to be known as ‘mainstream American writer’. She has moved from aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration.

Sudesh Mishra rightly remarks that the concept of home becomes vital in diasporic writing. There are polarities of attraction and repulsion experienced by the characters towards and from their homeland in the writings of the diaspora. Sudesh Mishra says, “The movement from Naipaul to Meera Syal suggests an important rethinking of the concept of ‘home’ within the diaspora, especially as this occurs against the backdrop of the global shift from centering or centripetal logic or monopoly capitalism to the decentering or centrifugal logic of transnational capitalism. Whereas for sugar diaspora, ‘home’ signifies an end to itinerant wandering, in putting down the roots, ‘home’ for the masala diaspora is linked to the strategic espousal of rootlessness, to the constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes.”¹⁹

Different labels have been attributed to Indian diasporic writing such as 'Trishanku' image from the mythology of India suggesting dangling, uncertain identity neither here nor there. It can also be called Desh/Pardesh Syndrome. Rushdie extends his perception of migrant writers as endowed with a double/plural, insider/outsider perspective. The alienated consciousness of the writer using the English language is an important factor. The relationship between East and West often used for different polarities of ways of life has also been explored in diasporic writings. Diasporic Indian writers are often criticized on the ground that they write for the Western readers or with an eye towards winning a Booker or a Commonwealth writer's award.

History and magic realism have been the major preoccupation of the recent Indian writers writing in English, particularly some diasporic Indian writers. They are often overburdened with history and suffer from excessive weight of historical references. Amitav Ghosh explores, for example, the relationship between human destiny and historical events. In the works of diasporic writers, there is recurrent theme of comparison between 'home' culture and the culture of the country where the writer is settled. Vinay Dharwadkar in his essay *The Historical Formation of Indian English Literature* (2003) mentions how migrant and itinerant writers have energized Indian writing in English during different historical phases starting from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to present day writers. He states that the diaspora has perceptibly modified the four primary zones of contact that provide a social framework for Indian English literary culture since the late 18th century. Firstly in its foreign setting, Indian professionals come into contact with people from different races and nations. They now form multicultural and multilingual international white collar work force. It has also attracted a large number of educated Indian women into a various professions especially in the USA. It has certainly contributed to the growth of Indian women's literary intellectual output. Now there are well-educated and professionally successful Indians scattered around the globe. Though fragmented, they are an interlinked community that contributes simply to the country they belong

to and also the world in general. They are also providing an extensive international readership for contemporary Indian English writing.

Secondly, the zone of marriage and family has undergone a radical change. It has resulted into interracial, intercultural social sexual relations. Interracial marriages among diaspora mediate the works of the diasporic writers, for example, thematization of homosexuality in Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, of bisexuality in Vikram Sheth's poetry and fiction, and of lesbianism in Suniti Namjoshi's poetry and prose. Thirdly, many Indian-English writers in diaspora come from non-Christian background. They constitute a wide spectrum of religious background and in spite of secular in content and perspective, the diversity of the religious background give them different ethnic, regional and cultural identity. This diversity also lends their writings great strength and variety. There are several Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi writers that represent Indian diaspora.

Fourthly, the zone that has expanded in the diaspora recently is that of intercultural friendship and social relations. The conception of Indianness and East-West encounter has undergone a great change. Indian immigrants in different parts of the world differ from each other in their attitudes towards India, Indian religion and culture and the concept of Indianness that is directly related to psycho-social effects of dislocation and displacement.

Diaspora literature, thus involves an idea of a homeland, the narratives of harsh journeys undertaken voluntarily or by compulsion economic, political or social. Diaspora continues to relate, personally or vicariously to their homeland in one or the other way. Their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are thus defined by the existence of such a relationship. There are certain common elements in all forms of Diaspora viz. the sense of yearning for their homeland, a curious attachment to the traditions and culture of their country and ethnic group, religion and language. These elements give birth to the literature of the Diaspora which is primarily concerned with individual's or community's attachment to homeland. Return to homeland is metaphorical and the yearning for homeland is often counted

by the desire to belong to the new home. Therefore the migrant remains what Rushdie calls 'a peripheral man', a creature living on the edge.

According to Amitav Ghosh, "the Indian diaspora is one of the most important demographic dislocations of Modern times".²⁰ The first diaspora consisted of disprivileged and subaltern classes and return to homeland almost impossibility. Physical distance thus became psychological alienation and the homeland becomes the sacred icon in the diasporic imagination of the creative writers. The second diaspora was the result of man's choice and inclination towards material gains, professional success and business interests. It represented access to advanced technology, communication and material comforts available with luxurious lifestyle. The diasporic writers engage in cultural transmission of a map of reality for multiple readerships. They are equipped with bandies of memories and an amalgam of global and national strands that embody real and imagined experiences. Diasporic writings are to some extent about the business of finding new angles to enter reality. One of the most remarkable aspects of diasporic writing is that it forces, interrogates and challenges the authoritative voice of history. Most of the fiction of the South Asia is replete with the diasporic consciousness which is nothing but the witness of all the happenings of social realities, longings and feelings of belonging. Most of these works are written in the background of post-colonial times which created new challenges and new set of questions regarding identity and belongingness.

During the last two decades, the term 'diaspora' has been used in a wide range of humanistic disciplines. In 1991, Toloyan launched a journal of transnational studies. There have been several attempts at renaming diaspora with the terms like exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial minorities and so on. Historically, diaspora refers to Jewish and Christian histories of religions. Jews, Scholars and studies of Judaism used the term to denote Jews who lived outside the 'Promised Land'. Diaspora refers to the land across which one is dispersed, the activity of dispersion and the people who are dispersed. The term diaspora thus has

geographical-sociological and historical meanings. Later, the term diaspora was applied to non-Jewish non-Christian people and it was applied to the exile situation of Africans as African diaspora. African diaspora refers to global dispersion of Africans whether voluntary or forced, throughout history, the emergence of cultural identity based on origin and social condition. The term then was applied to social sciences also. John Armstrong in 1976 investigated socio-economic conditions of the migrant groups. He contrasted proletarian diasporas of unskilled workers with mobilized diasporas of skilled, trained and qualified workers and professionals. Gabriel Sheffer and some other scholars took up the term for political science. In his classic work *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (1986) he emphasized the characteristic of a Diaspora as trans-state networks. In 1991, inaugural issue of the journal 'Diaspora', William Safran suggested six key characteristics discussed in this chapter earlier. Robert Hettlage outlined a sociological theory of diaspora while Gerard Chaliand and Jean Pierre Rageau sketched out the global dispersion of eleven national-ethnic peoples. Cohen emphasized the creative and innovative aspects of diasporic situations. He observed that the term diaspora in modern context is simply the outcome of continental and international migration.²¹

Diasporic subjectivity calls attention to the conditions of its formation. Contrary to studies of diasporas as objects of analysis where race or religion might be considered a defining feature, it can be argued that no one is born diasporic. Rather, one becomes diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence. Thus, to be black, for example, does not, automatically translate into a state of being within the black diaspora. Blackness is not inherently diasporic. Black diaspora subjectivity emerges in what it means to be black and live through the displacements of slavery and to carry into the future the memory of the losses compelled by the legacy of slavery, to be torn by the ambivalences of mourning losses that are both your own and yet not quite your own. Black diasporic subjectivity emerges in relation to other diasporic communities and through the depths of histories that will not rest because they have had no peace. Diasporic subjectivity

requires both a lateral engagement across multiple diasporic communities and identities and vertically through long histories of dislocation.

In lateral terms, diasporas do not emerge in isolation, but are defined through difference. In contemporary debates, diasporas tend to be discussed in their singularities. Thus, there are extended discussions of the black diaspora, or the Chinese diaspora, or the Indian diaspora. When critics take up explorations of more than one diasporic community, these multiple diasporas tend to be discussed as examples of various types of diasporas. There is relatively little discussion of diasporas as they emerge in relation to one another. And yet, we know from Stuart Hall that diasporic identities emerge through difference and not as singular and self-evident manifestations of diasporic experience. The tendency toward thinking through diasporas in isolation results in a definitional morass. Rather than discussions of how one diasporic community emerges subjectively in relation to another, we are left with objective declarations of diasporas as representative types and debates about true versus false diasporas. What is needed is a finer understanding of diasporas constituted through difference. This means not only adequately understanding how diasporas are internally complicated and divided in this complexity, but also how diaspora as a term and critical force has emerged in relation to other emergent fields and disciplines. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin so evocatively note, “if a lost Jerusalem imagined through a lost Cordoba imagined through a lost Suriname is diaspora to the third power, so is a stolen Africa sung as a lost Zion in Jamaican rhythms on the sidewalks of the Eastern Parkway”. These losses are not only shared across geographies and communities, but are also constitutive of each other. For a lost Zion sung in Jamaican rhythms can only be imagined within the knowledge of a lost Jerusalem and a stolen Africa. These are not parallel losses, but losses which inform each other, losses whose songs of remembrance call forth one loss even as they commemorate another. They share continuities even as they persist in their differences. Modern diasporic studies have shifted the emphasis from religion and religious identification to ethnicity and ethnic

adherence. In recent years, a rather free, arbitrary and often plainly metaphorical use of the term 'diaspora' has emerged decomposing the early Greek philosophical meaning that encompassed certain situations and relations. Diaspora is positioned by scholars as a check to the dominant discourse of rootedness and nation formation. It opposes essence, purity and sedentary and favours hybridism and mobility as strategic forms of resistance.

Diasporic literature is quite varied. Today, multicultural literature is considered as major source of insight into the rich cultural dynamics of modern society. In the countries like the USA and UK, it is generally acknowledged that some of the finest contemporary literature produced there is multicultural.

In the USA, there are writers from Arab American, Asian Americans, Africans, Hispanic, Native American ethnic groups. They all constitute a large chunk of diaspora with distinct sensibilities. These diasporic groups differ from each other and they also differ within themselves in their attitude towards the host country. One of the early Arab immigrants' pets comprised of writers from Lebanon and Syria which included Ameen Rihani, Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Elia Abu Madi. Gibran is quite familiar to the US readers and readers elsewhere, Ameen Rihani is considered 'the father of Arab American Literature'. Like Walt Whitman, he sang of himself and America. *The Book of Khalid* (1911) written in verse deals with immigrant experience. Gibran's works are profoundly philosophical. *The Prophet* has put him alongside the greatest of poets and philosophers. He freed Arab American writers of their' self consciousness addressing to pies other than immigrant experience. Mikhail Naimy was once nominated for the Noble Prize in literature. His famous work *The Book of Mirdad* shows his search for spiritual solace and guidance from the eastern philosophy. Arab American writings are not limited to issues of culture and identity, homeland and heritage. Naomi Shihab Nye, a Palestinian American, is recognized as an outstanding poet. Prose writer and anthologist. Other notable Arab American

writers are Samuel Hazo, a poet of Lebanese and Syrian heritage, Diana Abu Jaber who had moved to New York with her parents at the age of seven and Mona Simpson of Syrian-American parentage. Though these writers are immigrant writers, they rarely show the sense of dislocation or displacement in their works.

African diaspora literature is quite rich from the point of view of the feeling of dislocation, displacement, exile and longing for roots. Awoonor celebrates the recovery of the repressed history of the black Africans. Home as physical construct may have been destroyed but it survives as imagined construct in the memory. In Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, African Joe Golder has been presented as a laughable homosexual. He derides Africans for their nationalism and their black ancestry. Ama Ata Aidoo presents the failure of return of the African American woman to Africa where she faces rejection. She thus challenges the myth of smooth return of African Americans to their homeland. Ghanaian novelist *Why Are We so Blest* allegorizes the exploitation of the Africans. However, South African novelist Bessie Head celebrates the possibility of reconnection between the traditional African woman and modern African American women. There are remarkable black American woman and modern African American women. There are remarkable black American writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, Octavia Butler, Walter Mosley, Rita Dove and so on. Rita Dove has been honored with a term as poet laureate of the USA in the early 1990's. Her collection *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999) is a wide ranging insightful venture into family relationships. She has written several powerful plays also. Marilyn Nelson focuses on interfamilial relationships and status of women in society. August Wilson is one of the most significant playwrights who has won two Pulitzer Prizes.

In women writers and poets like Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison, we come across paralysis of consciousness that is born of psychic and cultural death. Alice Walker writes in one of her poems:

“My struggle was always against

an inner darkness,
I carry within myself
the only known key to my death.”

Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Paule Marshall are some of the most powerful black voices that present the cultural and mental universe of the colonized. Ngugi says that values are the basis of identity of the people and colonialism tries to empty their brains of all form and content and destroys their identity former. Such people experience alienation from themselves and lose touch with themselves.

South Asian diaspora comprise of countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Srilanka. In the global market today, South Asian Writing in English has received unprecedented attention. Salman Rushdie’s seminal novel *Midnight’s Children* and his subsequent works received wide acclaim. Michael Ondaatje, Aundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S.Naipaul, Vikram Sheth have anchored a place for South Asian writing in English on the international literary scene.

The South Asian literature has certain common traits as many works call attention to the idea of Empire and interrogate the colonial history. The struggle for independence, the tragic saga of Partition of India and Pakistan, the mass migration of Hindu and Muslims on both sides of the newly framed borders, violence that followed it, have found expression in literature of India and Pakistan. The ethnic tensions in Srilanka, the long standing conflict between the Government of Srilanka and Tamil Tiger rebels has claimed more than 60,000 lives and displaced more than 1.5 million people. These sufferings have also found voice in Srilankan literature.

Much of the south Asian diasporic writings focus on the issue of identity, often juxtaposing the individual and collective, private and public, local and foreign. Religion and politics became focal point of discussion in many diasporic works. On the whole, these write takes border, secular

humanist view and yet nourish a kind of nostalgia for their past and traditions. In case of women writers, there is more emotive expression of feminist issues in sociopolitical construction of the nation. For many diasporic writers the act of writing implies their way of reclaiming their homeland. The immigrant's story has proved to be a very fertile subject and the South Asian immigrant writers have attempted to record the predicament of displacement, celebrating and/or questioning the act of straddling two cultures and coping with new countries and their cultures.

The narratives of these diasporic writers are varied and realistic. The settings are also as varied as themes. Harl Kunzru's novel *The Impressionist*, for instance, stretches from Rajasthan to Agra, Mumbai, London, Oxford and finally to a remote African landscape. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are set both in Indian and American locales. Rushdie's *Shame* is despised in Pakistan but the narrator tells as that it is a factious place and not real Pakistan. These writers use English in distinct ways to authenticate place, character and experiences. There are immigrant writers who live in Canada, Germany, UK and USA. Majority of Indian English writers today live abroad such as Naipaul, Rushdie, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Sheth, Rohinton Mistry, Uma Parmeshwaran, Bharati Mukherjee, Anjana Apachana and so on. Uma Parmeshwaran talks of two quite distinct waves of emigration, one that took place during colonial period and the other after independence. The first wave consists of indentured labourers, traders and educated people while the second wave that started after 1960's can be called gold rush period. The decade after 1990's can be designated as that of multiculturalism. The Indian writing in Canada is largely preoccupied with complexities, contradictions and ambivalences of immigrants in geographically hostile country. Lakshmi Gill in her poem *Out of Canada* makes the speaker question where she would be buried. The speaker wishes to die not in Canada but at the foothills of the Himalayas. Thus, what seems longing for homeland is a critique of the host country.

Women writers have carved niche among diasporic writers. They belong to different countries like India, Pakistan, Srilanka, Bangladesh and so on. The major diasporic women writers are Meena Alexander, Moniza Alvi, Anjana Apachana, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sujata Bhatt, Yasine Goonratne, Sunanda Mongia, Uma Parmeswaran, Kamala Markandaya, Hima Raza, Suniti Namjoshi, Meera Syal, Bapsi Sidhwa, Sunetra Gupta, Jean Arasanayagam etc.

Diasporic writers have explored various genres of literature fiction, memoirs, fictional narratives and poetry, fiction being the most noteworthy contribution. Naipaul's novels and other fictional works deal with Third World problems and he seems to pose as a social historian and social critic. He often mixes fiction and autobiography in his works. His works are usually associated with the themes of rootlessness, disillusion, fantasy and dystopian vision. Vikram Sheth has experimented with various forms like poetry, novel in verse, a libretto travelogue, and a magnum opus *A Suitable Boy*. It is an expression of a reaffirmation of secularism and idealism. Sheth unlike other diasporic writers refuses to be labeled as immigrant Indian writer, commonwealth writer or any other kind of writer. He wants to be known simply as a writer. Bharati Mukherjee deals with experiences of migration and acculturation in the modern multicultural world but she avoids social, political and cultural criticism. Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* explores international issues such as globalization, multi-culturism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence Chitra Banerjee's *Queen of Dreams* deals with the theme of dislocation versus relocation, domicile versus diasporic consciousness, exile versus involvement.

Recently, there is an outburst of women diaspora a writers that include Aulta Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Bapsi Sidhwa, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Bharati Kirchner, Sujata Massey, Indira Ganesan and Shauna Singh Baldwin. Women face everyday problems of survival and continuance of life. They are the ones who have to quickly learn to adopt and

function in new surroundings. They exhibit extraordinary power of endurance, optimism and survival even under the most turbulent and arduous, testing conditions.

In comparison to the output of fiction, diasporic poetry lacks the richness and variety of fiction. However, there are some powerful voices like Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and others whose poetry shows the sign of their encounter with time, history, culture and their impact on poet's self and identity. There is a kind of poetic tension that enhances the richness to their diasporic writings. Sujata Bhatt, for example, carries the seeds of home within her memory wherever she goes. She says in no ambiguous terms:

“But I have never life home,

I carried it away

With me- have in my darkness in myself.”

Sujata's poetry is a unique blend of singularity and plurality, of local and global, wherein she seems to be cohabiting both 'here' and 'there'. All diasporic writers relate to places and countries at different levels. There might be what Makarand Paranjpe suggests referring to Sri Aurobindo's scheme of various level of relationship-physical, vital, intellectual, psychic and spiritual. Diasporic relationships of various writers/poets may be operating at one or the other levels or at several levels at the sometime. Paranjpe suggests rightly that India is not simply a geographical territory but an idea, not a mere desi but a darshna. From this point of view, all diasporic writers have one thing in common and that is mystical, indefinable relationship with India.

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CHAPTER II

The Diasporic Literature (South Asian Immigrant Creative Writing)

Chapter-2

The Diasporic Literature

(South Asian Immigrant Creative Writing)

Originally the term 'diaspora' (often with Capital 'D') referred to the Jewish diaspora indicating the dispersal of the Jews from Israel back in the sixth-seventh century B.C. and later in the second century A.D. from Jerusalem. Then from 200 A.D. to 900 A.D., there was large scale migrations between different countries for trade and people moved from one country to another for better prospects. Propagation of religions also became one of the important motives of migration. Colonial period witnessed migration due to war, slavery and imperial subjugation. People from colonized countries moved to other colonies as indentured laborers. The colonizers also captured the Africans and transported them as slaves. During the cold war era, people from Third world Countries became refugees in the UK, the USA and the other European countries. In post-modernist age, migration is mainly prompted by economic interests. The new diaspora in recent times generally hails from skilled professionals and upwardly mobile people.

Thus the concept of 'diaspora' in modern time has undergone a change. Time and space have shrunk on account of technological inventions and development of communication tools. Recent development of social networking has made a greater contribution in voiding this feeling. Facebook and Titter have searched for people their lost buddies and relatives living in far off land. This every moment communication and its easy availability have helped people to get adjusted in foreign lands comfortably. The trauma that accompanied displacement among the diaspora is almost absent. Safran identifies six features of the diaspora: *dispersal, collective memory, alienation, longing for the homeland, a belief in its restoration and the act of self-defining with the homeland*. In modern diaspora, we may not find all these characteristics but some new

phenomena such as relocation, assimilation, reconciliation and so on. The second generation diaspora literature focuses on the 'third space' which is the space of negotiating two disparate cultures. Then there is the question of identity, which is 'hybrid' identity. It combines pluralities and multi-layeredness. There are various identity groups among the diaspora depending upon the causes of migration and their responses to alien countries. The experience of displacement depends upon the factors like the generation of diaspora one belongs to, the attitude of the host countries, the causes that lead to migration and in recent context the effect of globalization. In modern times, the USA, for example, has become the second largest home of Indians in the world with more than two million people living and working in the US. The important question here is how one reconciles the continuity with the idea of location, dislocation and fluid identity. It must be noted that in the age of globalization, there is less dislocation but the psychological dislocation is the dominating trait of entire mankind today.

The diaspora of various countries and their experiences also differ as their history differs. David Pendery using Safran's model relates the Chinese, the Jewish and the Black diasporas considering their ethnicity, history, race, culture and identity. The Chinese can be termed as 'Sojourners', the Jewish as 'displaced people' and the Blacks as 'bondsmen'. Their homeland identities can be taken as nationalistic-mythic, autochthonous and mythic respectively. The initial new land identity of the Chinese is that of aliens, of the Jewish, as strangers and of the Blacks as subalterns.¹

The Chinese experienced arduous journey across an ocean to a new land followed by brutal, exploitative working environment. Blacks were forcefully removed from their homeland, their tribes and with the concept of a nation state quite unknown to them, their ideas of national, tribal unity were completely shattered in the USA where they were relocated as slaves. For them, the concept of original center was almost lost. The idea of mythic

Africa Collapsed ending into something of a singular racial identity. Chinese diasporic people did not have to face the huge challenge to their homeland identity and teleology of return like the Jews and the blacks.

An Anthology of Asian Writers- AIIIEEEEE! was published in 1974. It was the first major anthology of Asian American Writers launching fiery attack on American racialism. Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* redefined Chinese individual and community identity in America. Her aim was to deflate the outdated model minority myth and move beyond defensive assimilative posture of Lin Yutang and at the same time avoid combative approach of China and other writers and to offer an assertive, creative representation of Chinese diaspora and their experiences.

Despite individual community experiences and responses, diasporas live mobile, transitional, changing, evolving lives. They are decentered in the sense that they have moved away from their original centers-nations, communities and affiliations. Paul Gilroy's image of a ship is quite apt to define diasporic destiny. Gilroy writes that "The image of the ship – a living, micro cultural, micro political system in motion effectively captures the trans-nationality and intercultural relations, the exchange of ideas and activism."² Travel metaphors are quite useful in understanding the dynamics of diasporic experiences. The conception of the shore also acts as the margin, boundary, periphery, and both the last territory as an exit from a homeland and the entrance to a new land. Diasporas are conditioned by the home shore they have left and the new shore they arrive at. Their writings are testimony to this 'in-betweenness' or 'nowhereness'.

The Indian diaspora is the largest diaspora in the world with its global presence and a history that dates back to the Indian civilization. The Indians have been migrants for thousands of years. The Indian diaspora can be divided into three phases- ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient diaspora refers to laborers, crafts men and traders who explored new lands for work wealth and adventures. In medieval times, the British imperialism caused movement of the indentured laborers. In modern times, skilled,

educated and intelligent Indians moved to the USA and other European countries for economic and professional reasons. This 'new diaspora' is made of experts in different fields like IT, Medicine, Space Technology, Engineering, and Management and so on. There are eminent intellectuals, writers, orators, economists and financial experts etc. The Indian diaspora has attracted attention of the media and the people in general all over the world.

The Indian diasporic literature has become quite popular creating an impression that it represents true India. This is where the gist of the problem lies. Do the diasporic writings represent real India? Diasporic literature is certainly a useful resource for studying the psychology of the migrants. It speaks of diasporic experiences that the diaspora undergoes resulting from geographical displacement, alien customs, the problems of adjustment, longing for the homeland, the burden of beliefs, myths and heritage. These writers have double obligations. They write about their homeland for the natives of the country they have adopted and also speak of their diasporic experiences to the readers of their homeland. Diasporic literature can well be studied from Socio-Cultural point of view.

Makrand Paranjpe in his valedictory address at Patan, Gujarat discussed diasporic creativity. He asks - where are we to locate diasporic literature? Is it a part of some national literature or is it a completely different genre of writing? What are the critical parameters to evaluate this literature? What are the characteristics of a diasporic text? Makrand suggests two ways of reading some of the texts of diasporic creativity. It should be read along side their context but context should include a contrary text as well. There can be two kinds of contexts for diasporic text. One is a text by an English writer who actually lives in India. For example, Rushdie should be read alongside the writer like R.K. Narayan. The second context can be called vernacular context. For example, a writer living in Canada writes in Punjabi or any other Indian language other than English. He suggests that one way of reading *Midnight's Children* is to read it alongside *The Legend of*

Khassak by O.V. Vijayan. In doing so, we shall be able to evaluate the merits and claims of the diasporic writings.³ Just as Indian English writings threaten to submerge regional creativity, the diasporic creativity seems to submerge native Indian English creativity. In many universities abroad, the courses in Indian literature have around 80% of diasporic writings. This means that the diasporic writings are construed as representations of the homeland which is often not the case. Makrand Paranjpe says that all works by Indian or South Asian writers abroad cannot be called diasporic texts. For example, *Equal Music* by Vikram Sheth does not conform to the standards of a diasporic text. A diasporic text must have a structure of location followed by dislocation and relocation. There should be crossing of borders or boundaries, moving from one culture to another and sense of alienation, resistance, reaction, assimilation and so on. There must be longing and memory for home and the feeling of being exiled and displaced. A diasporic text must portray the experience of dislocation. Among the diasporic writers, we may find several types. Raja Rao lived abroad for more than half a century but never became the part of that culture. He was a permanent alien in alien country. Then there are some writers who are neither 'here' nor 'there'. There are like 'Trishankus' to use the metaphor employed by Uma Parmeshwaram. The third category is that of perfect immigrants who take foreign countries as their homes quite enthusiastically. However, their narratives certainly display hidden discontents and contradictions. Bharti Mukharjee can be cited as an example whose work *Jasmine* displays the fact the protagonist experiences the feeling of dislocation both in location from where she emerges and the location where she finally arrives. Thus *Jasmine* is certainly a diasporic text with diasporic sensibilities.

Location and home allow for ample space and abundance of language. The feeling of dislocation and alienation create both positive and negative possibilities. Dislocation may be physical movement from home caused by war and persecution. It may be a voluntary migration with the feeling of estrangement and displacement. Expelled from home and lost in

the Diaspora, such people have made a constant subject of fiction and poetry German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno rightly remarks,

“Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself. His language is expropriated, and the historical dimension sapped. The isolation is made worse by the formation of closed and politically controlled groups, mistrustful of their members, hostile to these branded different.”⁴

Nostalgia, longing and desire for home have become the central preoccupation of the diasporic writers. The 19th Century German poet Heinrich Heine’s poem expresses this kind of nostalgia very poignantly:

“A spruce is standing lonely
in the North of a barren height.
He drowns: ice and snowflakes
Wrap him in a blanket of white.
He dreams about a palm tree
In a distant eastern land,
That languishes lonely and silent
upon the scorching land.”⁵

Language, culture and history are the three major constituents of diasporic memory. They form an emotional link with the homeland. Memory creates a primal home, the desired location through romantic evocations of domestic scenes and people. Global development has succeeded in creating awareness about the local and the indigenous also. ‘Think globally, act locally’ has been the motto of our times. It applies to many new social movements and institution. Now there is a renewed enthusiasm for the native cultures and literatures. There is an upsurge of regionalism and promotion of locate traditions, local histories and art. Diasporic writing draws out attention to the fact that the earlier notions of centre and margin, home and exile are rapidly changing. This however, does not mean that diasporic

literature is anti-universal. Great art always transcends the mere local or the limited and rises to the level of universal and the permanent.

Language is the symbol of empowerment and thus the writing serves as a subtle tool for self discovery. One makes other's language his own. It incorporates rather than being incorporated. Thus diasporic literature can be viewed as the area for negotiating and contesting, for self-fashioning and refashioning. It emerges as a counter discourse which fictionalizes 'otherness' and 'difference' in the context of self and environment. Diasporic writings present dual perspectives that of the insider as well as the outsider. These writers have come out of 'closed' mentality and address the world that lies outside their respective communities and geographical boundaries. This aspect of diasporic literature makes it enduring and worthwhile. Its multicultural and pluralistic outlook makes it truly universal and appealing.

South Asian diaspora writings have received unprecedented attention and acclaim recently. Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* in 1981 drew the attention of the critics towards the growing and maturing South Asian writings in English often by the diaspora. South Asian writers like Michael Ondaatje received Booker Prize for *The English Patient* in 1992, Arundhati Roy Received Booker Prize for her novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997. Jumpa Lahiri got Pulitzer Prize for *Interpreter of Maladies* in 2000 and V. S. Naipaul was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. Novel and short story are the two genres that have become quite popular but it is heartening to note that there is a substantial amount of writing in English in other genres as well: poetry, drama, autobiography, memoirs and travelogues.

The South Asian experiences certain salient characteristics. Many works call attention to the idea of Empire and interrogate the colonial history. In the writings of Indian and Pakistani writers, the struggle for independence, the agony of Partition and its wounds are the recurrent themes. In SriLankan literature, the ethnic tension between the Sinhala and Tamil Tigers, violence and bloodshed it caused and displacement of around

1.5 million People from their homes find voice. A brutal Civil War that took place for independence from Pakistan figures in Bangladeshi literature quite often. Ideas of nationalism and attempts to define the new nations have become major concerns of the creative a writers.

A large bulk of these writings focuses on the issue of identity. South Asian writers writing in English largely favour a secular humanist perspective. There is the emergence of a new type of identity which is bases on humanism, tolerance and secular outlook. The notion of identity is an important focus particularly in the poetry of women poets who give highly volative expression to women's issues in sociopolitical construction of the nation. Many writers who have left their homelands describe their immigrant experiences, predicament of displacement, questioning or celebrating their encounter with the new alien countries. The settings of these narratives are quite varied. In Hari Kunzru's novel *The Impressionist*, the landscape stretches from Rajasthan desert, Agra, Fatehpur, Bombay, London, Oxford and finally to West Africa. Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories are set in Urban American as well as Indian settings. V. S. Naipaul takes readers to slums in Mumbai, Trinidad, England and African countries. Salman Rushdie's settings are often Pakistan and India, and England.

Economic development in South Asian countries has very positive impact on development of art and literature. South Asia has produced intellectuals of international repute who have turned to creative writings. Diasporic South Asians who pursued science, engineering, management and medicine have now turned to creative literature and media. Literary audience has also become globally aware and appreciates diasporic writings of the South Asian countries whole heartedly.

Sudhir Kumar in his paper *Diasporic Consciousness of Gandhi in Contemporary Diasporic Literature* edited by Manjit Indersingh calls Gandhi a diasporic writer who tried to mobilize the disparate and exploited 'girmittias' in South Africa and fight against racism and oppression. He created awareness among the Indians in South Africa touching upon their feelings of

alienation, nostalgia, displacement and memories of their past. The diasporic discourse is largely political which involves unequal power relationship and Gandhi was the first activist to realize this fact. Sudhir Kumar says,

“This makes Gandhiji, scores of decades before a Homi Bhabha and Spivak could theorize the hybridity who showed through his words and deeds both, how well this “hybrid condition” could be used for political empowerment of the most deprived diasporic subjects.”⁶

Sudhir Kumar argues that the contemporary diasporic writers such as Naipaul, Shashi Tharoor, Hari Kunzru, Salman Rushdie, Bharti Mukherjee and others have got a vital clue from Gandhi’s commitment to diasporic issues. They have realized that a creative writer needs to be an activist and crusader for justice and equality. Whether one agrees or not, Gandhi can certainly be called a first writer-activist who took up the diasporic issues like exploitation, oppression and erasure of identity in South Africa and fought against racism in a new way. Giriraj Kishore in his book *Pahela Girmitiya* has described Gandhi’s saga of struggle against racial oppression.

Noble Laureate Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is one of the most controversial writers of our times. He was born in a Hindu Brahmin family in Trinidad in 1932, a third generation West Indian of East Indian descent. Naipaul’s Eurocentric training influenced his thinking which made him reject both Hindu traditions and colonial society and its fake intellectualism. Naipaul left for England where he studied and wrote novels, essays, travelogues and short stories. He received many awards including the coveted Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. Naipaul condemned orthodox Indian traditions and became agnostic and non-believer. He also regretted the lack of native traditions in Trinidad. He felt that the Indian immigrants in Trinidad lived in double exile. In his works, one finds, recurrent themes of homelessness, spiritual isolation and perpetual exile. His creative talent has been shaped by continuous perception of rootlessness, deracination and displacement.

Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is constructed around the facts of his father's life. It focuses on the protagonists' desperate flight to have a house of his own; a symbolic act of a person's need to develop an authentic identity. Mohan Biswas, the protagonist is a universal figure transcending boundaries of time and place. Bruce King compares the protagonist with Shakespeare's King Lear. He says, "Biswas brings to mind Lear, unhoused, rejected by his family, alone with the Fools, un-protected from the violence of nature...Both the novels and the play are about individuals who thought they could stand on their own and find that once they are unhoused, powerless, outside society, madness follows."⁷

In *Area of Darkness* (1964), Naipaul attacks India several, particularly its poverty and squalor. He attacks the caste system and collective blindness of the people towards basic problems like poverty, lack of sanitation and segregation of society. He is critical of Gandhi and Nehru whom he considers grand failures. Naipaul has been criticized by many Indian writers and critics for his jaundiced view of India. In his book *The Mimic Men* (1967) focuses on the theme of colonial mimicry. He criticized the newly independent countries for their slavish imitation of the colonizer country. Individuals' sense of identity is strongly influenced by the colonizer perception of them. Naipaul comments "We became what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others." The protagonist "Ralph" Kripal Singh experiences the feeling of abandonment at the end of the empty world. *A Bend in the River* (1979) dwells on the harmful impact of colonialism and growing sense of nationalism in the Third World. Naipaul returns to India again and again in works like *India a wounded civilization* (1977), *India: A million mutinies Now* (1990). His novels *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *A way in the world* (1994) are autobiographical. His novel *Half a Life* (2001) portrays the ironic existence of diaspora through the story of Willy Somerset Chandran. *The Magic Seeds* is a sequel to *Half a Life* in which Willy Chandran undertakes a reverse journey from Berlin to India inspired by his sister Sarojini but in India, all his hopes crumble as he is unable to connect

with places and people in India. Willy is a drifter, a perpetual wanderer who is not at home anywhere but looking for home everywhere and finding it nowhere. The exile sensibility manifests in almost all major works of V.S. Naipaul making him a great diasporic writer.

Salman Rushdie was born in 1997 in Bombay. His parents migrated to Karachi in Pakistan. He studied at Rugby and Cambridge in England. He returned to Pakistan but founded in 'Creatively confounding'. In Pakistan he discovered, censorship was everywhere, inescapable, permitting no appeal. There was 'no room to breathe'. *Grimus* was his first work which was a failure. However, *Grimus* is an allegory of politics of Western powers. *Midnight's Children* is his sensual work which catapulted him to international fame. It deals with distorted politics of Eastern Hindu India. *Shame* dramatizes military politics of divided Muslim India. *Grimus* is a political satire on western secularism. It is a multi-dimensional novel, both picaresque and philosophical.

Midnight's Children deals with the vivisection of political secularism. It is a historical political fantasy about the Indian subcontinent. It narrates the story of Saleem Sinai in the first person narrative. The narrative spans six decades of 20th century. The protagonist Saleem Sinai embodies history of the Indian sub-continent in his tiny physical frame. He was born on 15th August, 1997 the illegitimate a son of a Hindu woman Vanita and William Methwold, an English man of mixed English and French blood, exchanged at the time of birth by the midwife, Mary Pareira and nurtured as the legitimate son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai. Saleem never experiences wholeness of personality and experiences fractured existence.

The novel begins with the loss of identity. Saleem is invested with extraordinary omniscience which enables him to have a peep into his prenatal existence. His mistaken identity is a factor that contributes to his rootlessness and fractured personality. The Sinai family migrates to Pakistan and settles in Karachi. Saleem comments on Jalian Wallah Bagh Tragedy, the independence and partition, Gandhiji's assassination, martial

law in Pakistan, Indo-China war, Indo-Pak war of 1965, the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, emergency in 1975 and Indira Gandhi's defeat in elections of 1977. Rushdie presents 'Memory's Truth' through cinematography technique.

Shame presents the history of Pakistan. It is a mixture of history, politics, allegory and satire. It is critical of Bhutto, his daughter Benazir and Zia-ul-Haq. Omar Khayyam Shakil is the protagonist who is a peripheral, fragmented personality in Pakistan. He is the son of three mothers and anonymous father. He is congenitally an isolated self. *Shame* is a political novel that presents dictatorship syndrome through caricature and irony. Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) created great controversy and violent protest. It has been banned in several countries and Aya Tollah Khomeine dictated in a fatwa, a death sentence against its author. In this controversial work, he again explores the theme of migration through the parallel lives of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Rushdie's post fatwa novel *The Moor's Last Laugh* (1995) reencounters the Islamic world examining the fluidity of history and cultural drift. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) explores the boundary-crossing potential of music. *Fury* (2001) thematizes creativity against the background of pop culture. Rushdie's works deal with the fractured lives of people against the onslaught of historical events. As a Diaspora writer, Rushdie transcends mere geographical and physical migration dealing with spiritual alienation and rootlessness.

Anita Desai is a remarkable novelist and proponent of a feminine sensibility. The subject of her fiction has been solitude and alienation. She usually dealt with private lives of people in general and women in particular. She does not agree to the circumscribed notion of feminism that fails to integrate women's issues with human right, democratic rights and larger national movement for civil liberties. *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) her first novel recounts the story of Maya who is married to Gautama, an unimaginative, insensitive lawyer. An astrologer had made a fatal prophecy that her husband would die in the fourth year of their marriage. Their married life is

punctuated by 'matrimonial silences'. Maya feels isolated and desolate. She turns schizophrenic after the death of her pet dog. She feels that she has "a body without a heart and a heart without a body". One calm and quiet evening, Maya goes up to the roof. She is bewitched by the sight of the pale moon. Gautama unconsciously stands between her and the moon. Maya causes her husband to fall from the roof to death. She regresses into an infantilism and subversive insanity and finally commits suicide.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, she moves to a more radical revolt of the middle-aged woman Sita. *Fire on the Mountain* examines the protest of two generations of women. *Clear Light of the Day* shows the importance of home and family. Tara and Bim are two sisters who differ in their attitudes and temperaments. Tara marries Bakul who is employed in diplomatic service abroad. There, they feel alien and return to India for reassurance of cultural identity. Bim sacrifices love and marriage and motherhood for life-long care of her aged aunt and retarded brother. She achieves symbolic motherhood and sustains family and home. She transcends the stereotyped binary opposition of sexes to approximate the ideal of Shiva and Shakti, the male substance and female energy. *In custody* explores the problem of alienation of an educated college teacher from his roots and culture. *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) is about India from foreign perspective. *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) describes the pilgrimage of three Europeans to India. It employs journey motif for the spiritual quest when shows the uncertainty of the diasporic condition. Sophie undergoes the intense diasporic experience. She remains with Matteo but she is unable to justify his spiritual craze. She bears him two children but shields them from their father's spiritual madness. By juxtaposing Matteo's spiritual obsession with Sophie's rationalistic position, Anita Desai shows the inadequacy of both. She deglamorizes the Western craze for instant 'nirvana'. *Fasting Feasting* (1999) is set both in India and USA. It attempts to portray India and the USA in their different perspectives.

Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985) deals with the migration of the Indians to England and disillusionment they often experience there. Dev comes to England to pursue his studies but he finds it very difficult to adjust with the alien surroundings. He is unable to bear the silence and emptiness of London. He feels trapped and racially conscious England questioning his choice of becoming "Macaulay's Bastard". However, he asserts that he was there to interpret India to them. Adit is a romantic admirer of England in the beginning but later he is drawn back to India the country which he called dirty and lazy. Sarah is an English girl married to Adit also faces identity crisis. She is romantically in love with India but when her husband expressed the desire that their child should be born in India, she felt shocked and surprised. She felt the sense of being uprooted. She accompanies her husband to India bidding goodbye to England. Anita Desai is also concerned with larger diasporic issues like inner alienation and uprootedness - rather than mere geographical displacement.

Kamala Markandaya is the pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya born of a reputed family in Mysore in 1924. In 1948, she went to England hoping to support her as a journalist. However, in England, she had a tough time. She married an English man and lived in England as an expatriate. She is now a British citizen but her writings are anti-colonist and anti-imperialist. Her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1959) is her literacy tour at force. *Some Inner Fury* focuses on cultural difficulties involved in an interracial relationship that develops between Mira and Richard Marlowe, an English man. Her novel, *The Nowhere Man* (1972), with the sufferings of the first generation immigrants in England. The protagonist of the novel Srinivas leaves his native land to settle in England but eventually, he finds that he belongs nowhere. Through flashback technique, she recounts Srinivas's past life in India juxtaposing it against his present sufferings in England. The novel deals with the issues of diasporic angst, psychological and physical displacement and hyphenated identity often experienced by the immigrants in an alien country.

Bharti Mukherjee was born in 1940 and moved to Britain at the age of eight with her family. She was educated in Calcutta, Baroda, England and the USA. She married Clark Blaise, a Canadian in 1963. She moved to Canada with her husband but later returned to the USA where she taught at various universities. Bharti Mukherjee and her husband played supportive roles in each other's career. They pursued independent writing but also produced two nonfiction works in collaboration. She has combined a career of creative writing and teaching very successfully. Her choice to settle in the USA has had a liberating effect on her creative career. She embraced the openness of the American culture and its respect for one's individuality with enthusiasm and joy. She has stated emphatically that she would like to be treated as an American writer and not as a hyphenated or ethnic one. She is happily assimilated in American environment. In fact, her experience as an expatriate forms the main source of her writings. She is also concerned with migrations, dislocations and relocations. Her works also deal with the issues of identity, the notion of belonging, the feeling of alienation and rootlessness. She also questions the biases and prejudices of the two antipodal worlds.

In earlier works, Mukherjee deals with cultural encounters between India and the United States but later, her works shift the focus to other multicultural encounters that take place in the USA. Her first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) has strong autobiographical overtones. It narrates the story of Tara who gets married to an American and returns to India briefly but finds that she is unable to connect herself to her motherland. She fails to adjust with the things. Once she loved and admired in the past, she feels like an alien in her own city Calcutta. At last she returns to the USA the land of her adoption. The stories of *Darkness* (1985) present the experiences of Indian immigrants in the USA. *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) focuses on immigrants from various countries that form the American Salad Bowl. Though they are minority voice, they are vital part of the American mainstream. As they contribute in the making of the American culture.

The Holder of the World (1993) focuses on the 17th century colonial America and the Mughal India. The novelist creates a vivid and complex tale of dislocation and transformation that take place in an amalgam of two cultures. *Leave It To Me* (1997) is the story of a female child abandoned by a hippie mother from California. The girl child who becomes a young woman goes in search of her roots and true parentage. The revenge story is interwoven with the question of identity presented through twin motifs of Kali and Electra. Here the novelist explores the hyphenated individual's dilemma in the multi-ethnic USA. In her novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) the concerns are again female identity and re-rooting of the self. *Jasmine* (1990) is the story of a rebellious girl Jyoti who rebels against the conventional set up of the traditional society. She goes to the USA where she becomes Jasmine, a personification of Americanness. Bharati Mukherjee writes about a minority community which frees itself from ghetto and adapts to the mainstream American culture and lifestyle. She advocates that through adaptation, adjustment, assimilation and acculturation, the immigrants can overcome the trauma of displacement and alienation. She is a diasporic fiction writer who holds that migratory experiences have enriched expatriate literary writings.

Ruth Jhabwala was born of Polish/Jewish parents in Germany in 1927. In 1939, her family migrated to England as refugees. The condition of displacement continued in her adult life also. She married an Indian Parsi architect and moved to New Delhi. After 24 years of struggle in India, she has made another home in New York. Her works include *To whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1957), *The Householder* (1960), *Heat and Dust* (1970), *In search of Love and Beauty* (1983), *Three continents* (1987), *Poet and Dancer* (1993) and *Shards of Memory* (1995). *Heat and Dust* is considered her best work which had won her the prestigious Booker prize. The novel discusses India and its effects on the Westerners. Jhabwala's disillusionment is also evident in her short stories. She is critical of those who romanticize India and turn to the East for the spiritual search. She abhors exoticism that often attracts the Westerners

to India. She is equally critical of the Indians who run after western materialism. She believes that one needs to have roots in one's culture in order to absorb the good in another. Ruth Jhabwala is a non Indian writer writing from an objective, intelligent observer, satirical commentator and close investigator of the Indian ways of life. She has described the theme of East-West encounter and explored the theme of expatriation in India. She portrays psychological turmoil of the expatriates in her works with rare insight.

Anita Desai's daughter Kiran Desai was born in 1971. She immigrated to the USA at the age of 14, when she got a degree in creative writing. She lives in Manhattan but often visits India and the United Kingdom. Her work *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1999) was her debut which earned her quite a remarkable acclaim. Kiran, in spite of her split residential situations feels at home in India. She feels at India is her hermitage and it throbs in her blood. However, Kiran requires developing her literary skills expected of a matured creative artist.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London to Indian parents her parents moved to the United States after her birth. Lahiri's collection of her short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* won her prestigious Pulitzer Prize in the year 2000. It is a collection of nine short stories set in India and United States. The author has assumed the role of an interpreter of suppressed emotions. Emotional anguish and nostalgia form the basic theme of the book. As a child of immigrant parents, she has undergone the experience of living two lives-one in India and other in the USA. The title story is about a young couple caught too early in the tangles of marriage and parenthood. In a story *Temporary Matter* there is a portrayal of soured marriage brought about by the loss of a baby. *Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* is a story of a Pakistani scholar who visits an Indian family in the New England. Lahiri shows in this story that the Indian family and the Pakistani scholar experienced "single silence and a single fear". They forgot all differences that the two countries always experience. *The Third and the Final Continent*,

Lahiri sums up the diasporic experience by suggesting that assimilation is the only solution for survival in an alien land.

Anjan Appachana was born in 1956 in India but after her marriage, she moved to the USA with her husband. She teaches at Arizona state university and writes novels and short stories. Her two major works include *Incantation and other stories* and *Listening Now*, a novel. She dwells in domestic life and internal landscape. She explores the silence of women who are forced by patriarchal structure to maintain forced silence. *Incantations* is a collection of stories told by women of various age, experiences and backgrounds. In her novel *Listening Now* each chapter is narrated through the perspective of different characters involved in the life of Padma, the main character who has experienced tragic love, involving an illegitimate child and rejection by her lover. The author here maps the lines of urban middle class women who are caught between traditions and modernity. Her works do not directly deal with diasporic, situations but she objectively views the entangled lives of urban, educated middle class women reflecting on gender relations.

Anita Rau Badami was born in Orissa in 1964. She moved to Canada in 1991. Her first novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996) is based on her own life. The novel presents different perspectives of the mother Saroja in India and that of the daughter Kamini in Canada. It portrays the cultural affiliation versus individual desire. Her second novel *The Hero's Walk* became quick popular winning several literacy prizes. Here, the author illustrates the emotional tensions that underlie current notions of the South Asian diaspora. For Badami, Canada has become her home and Canada is a muted presence in all her works that represent both freedom and possibility.

Shauna Singh Baldwin is also the diasporic Indo-Canadian writer. She was born in 1962 in Montreal, Canada. In 1972, she moved to India where she attended school and college in Delhi. She married an Irish American, David Baldwin. Her novel *What the Body Remembers* is set between 1937 and 1947 in undivided Punjab, chronically the last decade of

colonial rule and partition of 1947. Considering the overwhelming male perspective in the Indian fiction of the partition era, Baldwin writes into history a female script around two women Satya and Roop, co-wives of wealthy Punjabi whose family is displaced by the partition. She portrays the pain, desires, sadness and moments of happiness of these two women. Since the terrorist attack on the world trade center and Pentagon, Sikh Americans and other minorities have suffered the racist backlash. As a writer and diaspora, she says "Each of us given the ability to create or destroy - I opt to create". She believes firmly that writing has a therapeutic value in strife-torn world.

Sunetra Gupta was born in Bengal in 1965. She spent her childhood in Ethiopia, Zambia and Liberia. Later she studied biology at the Princeton University and settled in London. Her first novel *Memories of Rain* (1992) won her Sahitya Akademi Award in 1996. Her works are characterized by stream of consciousness style focusing on the interior lives of her characters. Her other works are *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993), *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995) and *A Sin of Color*. Sunetra's interest lies in the inner worlds of her characters. Her writing interpolates cultures, histories and human understanding. Her fiction shifts the central preoccupation of diasporic writings from the crisis of identity to the mapping of a process of experience and feeling.

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi in 1938. She belongs to the Parsi minority group in Pakistan. As a child, she contracted polio and spent much of her early life as an invalid. She moved to the USA in 1983 and became the US citizen in 1992. *The Crow-Eaters* (1980), *The Bride* (1983), *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), and *An American Brat* (1993). Sidhwa deals with the theme of injustice towards women, religious intolerance and cultural prejudices. Despite the seriousness of her theme, she employs humour, satire, irony and caricature. In *The Crow Eaters*, she provides a rare glimpse into the lives of a marginalized ethnic group of a Parsi community in South Asia. *Ice Candy Man* is a story of a Parsi girl crippled by polio who

witnesses the ethnic atrocities in Pakistan during the partition. *An American Brat* explores the issues of intercultural conflicts and difficulties of maintaining a sense of one's community in the new global world. The novel explores the encounter of an immigrant to American culture.

Kamila Samsie was born in 1973 in Karachi, Pakistan. Her works of prose fiction include *In the city by the Sea Salt and Saffron* and *Cartography*. Her novels deal with violence and political unrest in Pakistan. She addresses the issues that are not parts of just a Pakistani but a South Asian diasporic reality. She seems to ask- does leaving one's country allow one to forget the constraints that one used to find oneself in? Or does one seek to construct a new reality that partakes from both worlds?

Amitav Ghosh is a versatile scholar, anthropologist, sociologist and creative artist. His works include *In an Antique Land*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. His novels blur boundaries of different genres - fiction, history, anthropology and so on. Migration becomes an important theme of his novel as each journey serves to impact the identity of the traveler or the migrant. *In An Antique Land* shows how imperialism results in ruthless exploitation of the people from developing countries. Ghosh shows the ill-treatment of the Egyptians by the Iraqis. The same is true of the Indian diaspora in Burma who works in docks, mills, pulling rickshaws and emptying latrines. Colonialism was responsible for the first wave diaspora while neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism was the cause of the second wave diaspora. The first wave migrants brought more men from their countries as indentured labor helping the empire and colonizers. *The Glass Palace* shows how the soldiers from India in British Indian Army suffered. Many Indian soldiers of the Empire died tragic deaths in Malaya, Singapore and Burma longing for their homes. Amitav Ghosh's works stress the fact that homelessness is a fatal curse that befalls human beings during the course of history.

Philip Michael Ondaatje was born in 1943 on a tea estate in Keyalle, Ceylon (Sri Lanka). When he was 11, he left to study in England after his parents' divorce. In 1962, he immigrated to Canada. Though his ancestors are a mixture of Dutch, Sinhalese and Tamil, his outlook is British. He got his B.A. and M.A. in English and taught at some of the prestigious Canadian Universities. His important works are *The collected works of Billy the Kid* (1970), *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976). His collections of poetry include *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), *Rat Jelly* (1973) *Secular Love* (1984), *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems* (1991) and *Hand Writing* (1998). His novel *The English Patients* (1992) won the Booker prize. The author's diasporic background determines the themes of his works. He dwells in his writings on notions of home, identity, travel, history and migration. His success as a writer lies in sacrifice of his regionality, his past and his experience of otherness in Canada. His poems capture the insider-outsider dilemma that plagues the diasporic individual. He belongs and yet does not belong to his original home.

The protagonists in Ondaatje's works are always in the flux. The places that they inhabit are also mobile and transient. A sense of place is created through sights sounds and smells around him. His novel *The English Patient* also focuses on the theme of identity. *The collected works of Billy the Kid* is a collage prose, poetry and illustrations. The text reflects the fractures that characterize diasporic history. Past modern writers question and negate the idea of home but despite certain past modernist characteristics, Ondaatje's narratives show that diasporic writers try to seek firmer grounds on imposing imaginary homelands on certain geographical places.

Vikram Sheth was born in Calcutta in 1952. He studied in Oxford University where he earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy, Economics and Politics. He has published six books of poetry, three novels and a travelogue. *Mappings* is a collection of his translations into English from a variety of authors worldwide. His works *The Golden Gate* is a novel in

verse, 690 tetrameter rhyming sonnets. The book sold 1,50,000 copies. In 1993, he published a novel *A Suitable Boy*, the longest novel writer after Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. The novel centers on a story of a Hindu mother who searches for a suitable husband for her daughter. It deals with the issues like land rights, inter religious marriages and intersectional identity in modern India. *An Equal Music* (1999) belongs to the category of international literature. Sheth's works do not possess diasporic nostalgia, longing and sense of dislocation and marginalization. For him, the answer to the loneliness of the human condition seems to lie in the idea of a larger community. *An Equal Music* is an attempt to supersede the restrictive boundaries of nationalism advocating the philosophy of universal humanism.

I. Allan Sealy was born in 1951 in Christian family and attended La Martin ere School in Lucknow. Then he studied at St. Stephen's College, Delhi. He went to the USA for his master's degree. He visited New Zealand, Australia before moved back to India. At present, he lives in Dehradun. He is often labeled as an Anglo-Indian writer, a category that is used to differentiate it from Indian English writers. However, he says that his sensibilities are those of any westernized urban Indian. One of his major themes is the search for identity by his characters. His novel *The Trotter Nama* is the story of seven generations of Trotters in Sans Souci. The mixed parentage symbolically depicted in their grey skin compels them to question their exact identity. The novel creates a metaphor of hijda or hermaphrodite for these characters whose identity is not certain. In his next novel *The Everest Hotel*, Ritu, a young nun grapples with her own identity questioning the doctrine of total obedience to the Christian sisterhood.

Hari Kunzru was born in 1969 in England to an Indian father and English mother. His debut novel *The Imprisonment* was published in 2002. It focuses on the significance of multiculturalism as an individual experience. It is an attempt to explore the center lost between past of the country and British nomination. The protagonist's journey is not merely physical one but mental or inner. His novel is an exploration of the self through history and

traditions. Hanif Kureishi was born in 1954 in England of a Pakistan immigrant father and English mother. He grew up amidst first hand experiences of racial and cultural clashes. He is a play-Wright and film director. His success as a playwright lies in his own experiences of racial and cultural clashes in England. He says that in England, writers like him are culturally marginalized and the critics in England still do not realize that the world is hybrid. In his essay 'The Rainbow Sign' (1986), he recalls his experience as a misfit in racially torn England. It is an autobiographical piece examining his exile condition and ambiguities of identity. 'My Beautiful Launderette' is a story depicting the conflict between immigrants and youth cultures in England. His next film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* questions social/political class. His other films are *London kills me* and *My son the Fanatic*. He has written film scripts, plays and novels. In his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, he explores the familial and racial conflicts. *The Black Album* (1995) deals with a young Asian growing up in London. His works are critical of fundamentalism and censorship. His novel *Gabriel's Gift* (2002) shows his interests in pop, rave, ecstasy, rock music and the culture of drugs and sexuality.

Vikram Chandra, a novelist, short story writer, street play writer and essayist was born in 1961. He studied in Mayo College, Ajmer and got his bachelor's degree in English and creative writing from the USA. He studied in film school at Columbia University in New York. He also got M.A. from Johns Hopkins University and M.F.A. from Houston University. His first novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) achieved huge success. His second book *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997) is a collection of short stories. The five stories in the collection are named for the precepts of Hindu philosophy viz. *Dharma* (duty), *Shakti* (strength), *Kama* (desire) *Artha* (Economy) and *Shanti* (Peace). He has tried to show how these principles are woven with the lives of the Indian people. Chandra's works deal with intersection, collision and hybridization of different cultures. In his essay *The Cult of Authenticity*, he discusses several common charges against the Indian writers living abroad that they are insulated from true Indian

experience, regional writers necessarily reflect Indian realities more sincerely and that the diasporic writers target a western audiences. Chandra counters these arguments by saying that writers must be free and to be deliberately anti-exotic is to be limited and censored.

Upmanya Chatterjee was born in 1959 in Patna, Bihar. He graduated from St. Stephen's college, New Delhi and then joined I.A.S. in 1983. *English August: An Indian Story* was his debut novel. He also wrote short stories. His best known short story *The Assassination of Indira Gandhi* was published in William Heinemann collection of best stories in 1986. It was later included in Anthology title *Mirror Work: Fifty years of Indian Writing in English* by Salman Rushdie. The response to his first novel *English August* (1994) was overwhelming. It is the story of a young I.A.S. officer Agastya Sen who is posted in a sleepy backwater town of Madna. In Madna, Marijuana, masturbation and mosquitoes become his constant companions. He drifts between states of quiet restlessness and drug induced torpor. Agastya's alienation in Madna shows that even within the same country, one can experience the feeling of displacement and homelessness. It reflects on the metropolitan sensibilities and small town realities. Chatterjee's second novel *The Last Burden* explores the theme of alienation through dynamics of a family reunion in contemporary Indian middle class. Chatterjee had been to the U.K. as a writer in residence in University of Kent but he has chosen to live and write in India. He has worked on the theme of alienation but it is not the diasporic alienation but that of a dislocated, urban Indian.

Amit Chaudhari, born in 1962 in Calcutta was brought up in Bombay and later studied in England. He shuttled between India and England but finally settled in Calcutta. His works include: *A strange and sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom song* (1998), *A New World* and *Real Time* (2002). Chaudhari belongs to a new wave of writers with roots in post emergency India. His works are partly set in India and England. There are no catastrophic events in his works. He deals with

quotidian city life describing interaction with family servants, Indian culture, food and music. At the deeper level, he explores the themes of displacement and belonging through his characters that are not at home though they are in their familiar homely locations.

Meera Syal was born and brought up in a Punjabi immigrant family in England. She has traversed various creative areas like writing, film, TV etc. *One of us* is her play besides her novels *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life is not All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2001). *Bhaji on the Beach* a screen play portrays the confrontation between two generations of South Asian women. She satirizes older generation of women who are caught in time warp and are unable to accept new changes like individual self expression and sexual openness. Syal's forte is comic through which she expresses her belief that there is a possibility for a positive change. *Anita and Me* is an autobiographical work set in an English mining village, Meena, a 10 year old non white girl, faces racial discrimination and develops a deep crisis of identity. *Life isn't All Ha Ha and Hee Hee* deals with female friendship of three South Asian women.

The Parsee came to India from Southern Iran. They are a miniscule ethno-religious community. Their original homeland is Persian province Pars or Fars in southern Iran. They form almost 0.016 percent of India's vast population yet their contribution to economy of India, commerce, industrial development, politics and arts is highly remarkable. The Parsees follow Zoroastrianism which is considered as one of the oldest of the revealed world religions having its roots in a very distant past. The forced Islamization of Iran compelled Parsees to flee their homes and sought refuge in India. They came to the shores of Gujarat at Sanjan and dispersed in places like Ankleshwar, Navsari, Cambay and later many shifted to Bombay. Parsees have left an indelible imprint on Indian life with their unique contribution, particularly in industries and commerce. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first Indian to be elected to British House of Commons in 1892. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and Madame Bhikhaji Cama were great

patriots who fought relentlessly for independence of India. Madame Bhikhaji Cama was the first Indian woman to hoist the Indian tri-color on foreign soil. Jamshedji Tata has the pioneer of industrialization in India. The Parsees have contributed immensely in different fields like films, paintings, science, music and literature.

The Parsee writers fall into two categories: the writers who lived and wrote in India and expatriates. Dina Mehta, B.K. Karanjia, Keki Daruwalla can be cited as an example of stay at home writers. Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Ardashir Vakil and Boman Desai are expatriate writers. The Parsees, because of their small number, enjoyed a marginal portion in British India. The British employed them as agents and other important positions because of their English education and westernized life style. The Parsees considered English education as blessing for uplift and development of India. The Parsees often initiated western life style excessively almost losing their original identity. They often suffered from double alienation. Thus, Parsees could never be completely anglicized nor could they become merged with the mainstream Indian life.

Expatriation caused further alienation from their roots. Viney Kirpal observes regarding the impact of expatriation:

"He (expatriate writer) is not the de-regionalized, deracinated man of modern West. His marginality itself is the result of his race, region and history. And he writes with this realization in his bones." ⁸

The Parsees carry their ethnicity to the lands they move to. Many of them are motivated by their stay abroad. Some writers like Bapsi Sidhwa are unaffected by expatriation and remain rooted to the psyche of native land. Among the Parsees, Westernization and expatriation are the causes of dislocation but at the same time of their survival and development. The Parsee diaspora writers have contributed to fiction quite substantially both in quantity and quality. Rohinton Mistry was born in 1952 in Mumbai and spent his early life there. He graduated in 1975 from Mumbai University at the age

of 23. Mistry migrated to Toronto in Canada just one month after emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975. Mistry was not quite happy with his bank job. He started writing short stories and novels. His works gave him instant recognition. His works include: *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991) *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002).

In his short stories, there is a brilliant illustration of the feeling of displacement quite often. In a story *Lend Me Your Light*, Kesri says: "I am guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking immigration out of the land of my birth, paying the price in burnt out eyes: I Tiresias blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto" (180). His novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) is set in Mumbai with the political backdrop of Indo-Pak war leading to the birth of Bangladesh. *A Fine Balance* (1996) chronicles the state of emergency declared in 1975 by Indira Gandhi until the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. His depiction of atrocities and dismal quality of life is truly highly realistic. His protagonists belong to marginalized community and writer depicts how tragedy looms large over their fragile lives. *Family Matters* (2002) depicts Parsee community's struggle to preserve their identity in hostile environment.

Bapsi Sidhwas's works also provides the readers a rare glimpse into marginalized Parsi community in South Asia. Her major concern is also displacement and identity crisis. Her novel *Ice Candy Man* foregrounds the horrors of partition. In her works, there are multiple levels of diasporic experiences and their displacement. However, the novel ends with a note of assimilation. Parsees want stable and unified country whether it is India or Pakistan. *The Crow Eaters* throws light on a hitherto unexplored ethnocentric life of the Parsees. *An American Brat* deals with intercultural theme which has assumed vital significance as a post colonial novel. There is a depiction of conflicting value systems of the east and the west in the narrative of the novel. Feroza, the woman protagonist is torn between two worlds and she lives in alien country as a marginalized person. She is

unable to discard the old traditions and she is also unable to find solace into the adopted land. In many diasporic writings, there is depiction of clash of cultures but also the need for assimilation and adaptation. Bharti Mukherjee advocates the rejection of the old and the acceptance of the new. She almost rejects the Indian identity to become an integral part of the adopted land. Sidhwa's roots continue to exist in her homeland even though she believes that one must assimilate and develop the sense of belonging to the land of adoption.

Firdaus Kanaga's *Trying to Grow* celebrates the social life of the westernized Parsees. Sara and Sera, Brit's parents identify themselves with the colonizer. Brit's, on the other hand, observes the Western world like a disinterested outsider. The novel ends with apposite note of affirmation that growing is learning and adapting to realities. Ardashir Vakil was born in 1962 and is permanent resident of Britain. Cyrus Readymoney is an adolescent boy observed with films, food and sex. He is quite indifferent to his religion faith and rituals. He lives in the juvenile world of fantasy. Films are life sustaining or they provide him with illusions and fantasy. Vakil's another novel *One Day* describes an average day in the married life of Ben Tennyson and Priya Patnaik. The author portrays the world which is authentically multi-racial. Priya is an Indian girl married to an English man who is like 'a swivel of layered chocolate, dark and white'. The novel deals with multi racial marriage and conflicts it creates in the life of the couple.

Farrukh Dhondy is a multifaceted artist, a filmmaker, columnist, novelist, children's writer and editor. He was born in 1944 in Pune and was raised in India till the age of 20 when he went to study. He is a Parsi writer with westernized education and outlook. In his book *Bombay Duck*, he addresses the painful issue of religious fundamentalism and intolerance. It provides almost factual, unsentimental portrayal of multi-culturism of England Dhondy voices concern over the loss of culture in the Indian context. Xerexes is a marginal man who is in search of his roots. He is not happy with Zoroastrianism and that makes him quite in different all faiths.

Dhondy advocates that in any good society, it is not the limitations that individuals that should matter most.

Boman Desai's major concern is diaspora and it is the main purpose of his narrative in *The memory of Elephants*. Like Mistry and Dhondy, Boman Desai is also a Westernised Parsee but his narrative is overtly Zoroastrian. He refuses to convert himself to Christianity and rejects many things western. Nilufer Bharucha calls the novel an allegory employing the element of the fantastic. It is an example of tabulation that moves away from realism to functionality and romantic fable. Homi, the protagonist faces rejection in the west but he sticks to his faith in Zoroastrianism who reconciles the racial past with the present. Homi's journey into the racial memory is not more nostalgia but the way of putting the past in time perspective and redefining his own existence in the present.

M. G. Vassanji's works *The Book of Secrets* (1994) is set in East Africa and describes the experience of a fictional East Indian Community the Shams who is uprooted from homeland and relocated in Dar es Salaam. Vassanji himself was born in Nairobi, Kenya to Indian parents. He was brought up in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania before immigrating to the USA and finally settling in Toronto, Canada. He describes himself as 'an East African Canadian of Indian origin'. This work deals with the dynamics of exile from one home and self.

Diaspora literature of South Asian writers abounds in fiction while their contribution to poetry and drama is not so substantial. Poetry is the highest form of human utterance. Its language is metaphorical and much of the meaning lies between the lines. It often contains layers of meaning that need to be explored. The recent trend is not very heartening for poetry but poetry will never lose its significance in spite of the lean period it faces at present. In my dissertation, I am to focus on poetry of the diasporic women poets but in this chapter I have dealt with the diasporic literature of these South Asian writers in other genres of literature, fiction being the main genre practiced by these writers.

Diaspora poetry, though small in bulk in comparison to fiction, is quite commendable. Here, I shall deal briefly with diasporic poets including major women poets. In the chapters that follow, I shall deal with five women poets whom I have called 'Cassandras in Exile' – Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniz Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam.

A. K. Narayan was born in 1929 in Mysore in a conservative Brahmin family the received his B.A. in English from Maharajas College, Mysore and then M.A. from university of Mysore. He went to the USA on a Fulbright scholarship to study folklore and linguistics at Indiana University. In 1963, he got his doctorate. He taught at the University of Chicago for 30 years in the department of South Asian Languages and civilization. He received international recognition in the field of literature. He was awarded Padmashri in 1976 by the Government of India. In 1993, he died at the age of 64. He contributed 18 books and numerous essays this major partial works included *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), *Selected poems* (1976), *Second Sight* (1986). He was a great translator who tried to promote Dravidian literature and language in the western countries.

A.K. Ramanujan's poetry exhibits diastolic sensibility time and again. He lived in the USA but he could never dissociate himself from Indian culture, tradition, art and language. His poems often deal with memories of his relations and the land he was born and brought up. His poetry shows his sense of displacement particularly during his early years in Chicago. A diasporic writer often maintains conscious distance from the country where he loves and keeps on returning to his homeland through memories and nostalgia.

The sense of alienation from physical and cultural environment is expressed in the words below.

"In Chicago, it blows

....

Enemies have guns.

Friends have doubts
Wives have lawyers.

....

Give daughters pills,
Learn Karate.
In Chicago
lowest walk slow.”⁹

In a poem *On Memory*, the poet attempts no native memory,
“Memory,
In a crowd of Memories, seems
To have no place
at all for unforgettable things.”¹⁰

Ramanujan’s poems treat migration as loss of home and other relations, Kinship and family bonds. A person needs the sense of belongingness without which he/she experiences vacuum and solitariness. *Looking for a Centre* says that in modern world, there is no solution to the problems of personal identity, tradition and displacement.

“Looking for the centre these days
Is like looking for the center
For missing children.
Which used to be here, but now has moved.”¹¹

Ramanujan’s poetry is an attempt to resolve his distension through archetypal symbols and myths. Ramanujan, though lived in the USA, remained deeply rooted in India and Indian traditions. He remained rooted in the family and kinship with his homeland. This poem *Hindu to His Body* expresses his deep commitment to Hindu philosophy and Hindu tradition. He is therefore unable to adapt to American present and Westernized thinking. He continues to cling to the tradition he has inherited. In case of A. K. Ramanujan, it is the physical displacement that is responsible for his diasporas sense but it is his refusal and non-acceptance of the western way

of life that makes his a different kind of diasporic voice, this identify remains that of a homebound pilgrim. However, he acknowledges that he is the product of two forces – Eastern and Western. He admits:

“English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my “outer” forms – linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my “inner forms” images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where.”¹³

Nissim Ezekiel was born in Bombay in 1924 in a Jewish (Bene-Israel) & family. He studied in Mumbai and later in London. He was influenced by M. N. Roy’s Radical Democratic Party. Ezekiel died in 2009. He was a man of varied interests but he is mainly known for his contribution to Indian English poetry. These poetry collections include- *A time to Change* (1952), *Sixty poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The unfinished man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976) and *Later Day Psalms* (1982). He was trendsetter as a poet who condemned mediocrity and narcissistic attitudes in poetry. He stands for the synthesis of the Eastern and the western, the ancient and the modern. For him, poetry is an important means for the search of identity. He firmly believed that Indian writers should be deeply rooted in Indianness. He identified himself with India.

“I have made my commitment now.

This is one: to stay where I am.”¹³

As a Jew, he was a natural outsider but as he said himself circumstances and decisions related him to India. He says that a poet should always be ‘on fire’ trying to seek his true identity, not outer one but inner. He said,

“Confiscate my passport, Lord,

I don’t want to go abroad.

Let me find my sons

where I belong.”¹⁴

Diasporic poets often face trauma of displacement and rootlessness. Nissim Ezekiel is a poet with cosmopolitan outlook and faith in synthesizing power of art. Bruce King remarks very aptly:

“A central concern of Ezekiel’s poems always has been how, in an era of skepticism and secularity, one can live with a sense of grace, completeness, morality, truth and holiness”¹⁵

Regarding his marginality and how he tackles it, Bruce King says,

“Whether in London, Bombay or Edinburgh, there is mention of the small room, the place which is ultimately his, and is himself.”

16

Zulfikar Ghose was born in Pakistan in 1935 and then went to England in 1952. Since 1969, he has been living in the USA. His poetical works include *The Loss of India* (1969), (1969), *Jets of Orange* (1967) and *The Violent West*. Zulfikar’s poetry expresses his estrangement from his homeland. He had lived in India (undivided) before independence in deep communal harmony. Divided India gave him deep agony and pain. The brutal political realities tormented him. He wrote,

“India was at civil war,
The crow excreted where he pleases,
And I
reborn from a fairy tale
saw bones charred
in mounds on pavements.
It was no country
for princes, and eagles soared
above the darker clouds
The undergrowth
heaved uneasily with poison of snakes

'The heart is free !' People cried.
What if truth runs on like blood ?
We have our independence
'The blood of India ran out with my mouth.'¹⁷

In the beginning, he feels stranger and exiled in England. He says that in English, he feels like 'a child at museum' as if looking at 'England through pictures'. But by and by, the poet begins to experience intimacy and closeness in England. He says,

"Now I am intimate with England: we meet as lovers...
To this country I have come,
Stranger or inhabitant.

This is my home."¹⁸

At present, major women diaspora poets are actively voicing their anguish and ecstasy in their poetry. These major women poets are Meena Alexander, Moniza Alvi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jean Arsanayagam, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Sujata Bhatt, Sunanda Mongia, Panna Nayak, Gayatri Majumdar, Anne Runasinghe, Mani Rao, Hima Raza, Boshra Rehman, Suniti Namjoshi, Taslima Nasrin, Uma Parmeshwaran, Lakshmi Gill and so on. There are also diaspora poets both women and men actively creating their space through poetry in their regional languages also. There are diaspora poets who write in Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati and so on. Here I shall briefly introduce some of the major women poets writing in English and then more on to regional writers who have contributed to diaspora literature quite substantially.

Among those who write in English, Meena Alexander has achieved worldwide recognition for her extraordinary output both in bulk and quality. Meena was born in 1951 in Allahabad but she grew up in Sudan. She studied in England, taught at Delhi and Hyderabad and then migrated to the USA after her marriage with David Lelyveld, a historian of South Asia. Alexander calls herself an Indian as well as American writer and she has

multiple boundaries and affiliations. Most of her writings explore the themes of migrancy, exile, border-crossing, multiple births, anchorages and affiliations. Her poetical works include *The Bird's Bright Ring* (1976), *Without Place* (1978), *I Root My Name* (1977), *Stone Roots* (1980), *The Storm* (1989), *Night Scene, the Garden* (1989), *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988) and *River and Bridge* (1976). She has also written two novels: *Nampally Road* (1991), *Manhattan Music* (1997) and a memoir *Fault Lines* (1993). *Illiterate Heart* (2002) has won PEN Open Book Award in 2002. It is an extraordinary poetical work of one of the strongest female voices. In *Illiterate Heart*, the formation of identity through language within conditions of patriarchy and colonization has been vividly described. Meena Alexander's *Raw Silk* (2004) poems deal with poet's emotions on revisiting India after a long absence and finding wounds of communal riots in Gujarat. However, other poems are set in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks. She says that these poems are torn out of her flesh, her own carnal being, her body. Thus she partakes of the pain involved. In an interview with Ruth Maxey for '*The Kenyon Review*', Meena Alexander said,

“In a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some way to reconcile us to our world and to allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist.”¹⁹

Taslina Nasreen stands out as a great rebel, poet, essayist, novelist of Bangladesh. She is actively involved with women's rights movement, Human Rights movement, secular movement and feminist movement. She can be called a perpetual diaspora facing state of exile. She is an atheist revolutionary who has invited the wrath of extremists and fundamentalists. She is a physician by profession who is under the threat of death by fundamentalists. Like Rushdie, she has been charged of blasphemy and she has lived in exile in India and Sweden. She was attacked by fundamentalists in 2007 in Hyderabad. Taslima was born in August, 1962 in Bangladesh. She received her M.B.B.S. degree from Mymensingh Medical

College and worked as a physician with the health department of Bangladesh.

Taslina started writing poetry at the age of 13. Her openness and rebellious thoughts invited anger of the orthodox people. Her novel *Lajja* (shame) showed the ugly marginalization of Hindu community in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government banned the book and Islamic fundamentalists declared death sentence. In 193, a case of blasphemy was filed against her. Her poetical works include *Hunger in the Roots* (1986), *Banished Within and Without* (1995), *Poems from Exile* (1996), *Water Lilies* (2000), *Feeling Empty* (2004) etc. She has received numerous awards from all over all the world.

Taslina has been labeled as 'female Rushdie' by media. In 1994, Rushdie wrote a letter to her saying that she must not relent. He wrote,

"It is a disgrace that your government has chosen to side with the religions extremists against their own history, their own civilization, their own values." ²⁰

Taslina advocates equality and freedom for women. She wants women to liberate themselves from patriarchal bonds and live free life full of love and liberty. She addresses a sad girl in one of her poems.

"Sad girl, forget your sorrow
Throw open all the windows
Dance as you please in the whirlwind of
light and air." ²¹

Taslina is angry at religion bigotry. She wants all religions to be abolished and wants to establish only the religion of humanity. She wants all temples, mosques and churches to be burnt and turn them all into prayers halls into hospitals, playgrounds, gardens, academics of arts and universities of learning. In a very poignant poem she says:

“I’m going to move ahead
Behind me my whole family in calling,
My child is pulling my sari-end,
My husband stands blocking the door,
But I will go.
There’s nothing ahead of but a river
I will cross
I know how to swim.
but the wont let me swim, won’t let me cross.”²²

Her poem *Women and Poets* expresses her philosophy of poetry. She says that the source of poetry is pain and therefore when a human being suffers, he/she becomes a woman, a poet. She says:

“You have to be a woman first if you want to give birth to a poem.

A word without any pain is fragile, breaks when touched who knows more than a woman all the lanes and alleys of pain!”²³

Sujata Bhatt was born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 1956. She grew up in Pune and immigrated to the USA in 1968 where she got an MFA degree at the Writer’s Workshop at the University of IOWA. Currently she lives in Germany. She has translated Gujarati poetry into English for the Penguin anthology of Contemporary Indian women poets. Her major collections of poetry include- *A Colour of Solitude* (2002), *Monkey shadows* (2001) *Augatora* (2000), *The Stinking Rose, Brunizem* (1993) and *Point no Point* (1997) etc. She has lived in India, Europe and the US and has widely travelled across different countries. Her poetry shows the impact of changing environments that she encounters as a diaspora. She feels the pain of displacement but she avoids its exhibition. She carries with her the seeds of home wherever she goes. A sense of continuity in terms of relationship with home and its memory pervades throughout her poetry. She says:

“I am the one
who always goes
away with my home
which can only stay inside
in my blood-my home which doesnot fit
with any geography.”²⁴

In *The One who Goes Away*, reiterates very plainly and openly.

“But I never left home.
I carried it away
with me- here in my darkness
in myself.”²⁶

Her post colonial consciousness is reflected in her poem *History is a Broken Narrative* where she says that when one changes a language, one makes one's own language. In many of her poems, she is quite nostalgic about her childhood and past memories. This process leads her to constructing the image of home and nation. In the next chapter, I shall deal with Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt's diasporic sensibility in details discussing their relevant poems.

Eunice de Souza was born in 1940 whose major poetic concern has been ethnicity. Her first book *Fix* published in 1979, underscores her struggle to find a way by which she could belong to the main stream in cosmopolitan Bombay where she has lived for a long time. In her poem *De Souza Prabhu*, the speaker in the poem says that her name is Greek, Surname Portuguese and language alien. However,

“These are ways of belonging”²⁶

She is a poet of Goan origin who finds it difficult to deal with multicultural aspects of her being she often refers to her Goan roots as she is Portuguese Goan Roman Catholic based in Bombay. In many of her poems, she refers to her 'Goanness', its customs, traditions, upbringing, social taboos, inherited lifestyle and the discomfort that she faced in

following them or opposing them. Melanic Silgado, a Goan poet and former student of Eunice de Souza, was born in 1956. She too is a Goan catholic who has now settled in the UK. Her poems are quite confessional. She suffers through her rejection of her father and she expresses this pain:

“You never knew I met my pillow
oftener than I had ever met my bed.”²⁷

Both De Souza and Silgado deal with the problem of being alien in their own family environment and lack of communication and emotional charm.

Imtiaz Dharker was born in a Muslim family in Lahore, Pakistan in 1954. She was realized and educated in Britain. She has married an Indian Maharashtrian Hindu and lives in Bombay. Her collections of poetry are *Purdah* (1989) and *Postcards from God* (1994). She is an artist. Illustrator and filmmaker and through her creative works, she has expressed her distinctive multicultural and multi-ethnic voice. In a poem *8 January 1993* (Post Cards from God), she describes Bombay riots after the assault on the Babri Masjid. In a poem ‘Minority’, she writes:

“I was born a foreigner,
I carried on forms there
To become a foreigner everywhere
.....
I don’t fit,
like a clumsily – translated poem.”²⁸

Dharker feels that she will continue to face identify crisis and marginalization in Bombay. She is a ‘Nowhere Person’ who regards herself as a citizen of the world but never completely at home anywhere in it.

Chitra Banerjee Divakarnni was born in Calcutta in 1956, she studied in Calcutta and then in the USA. She started writing poetry moved by the dual forces of pre-immigration and post-immigration conditions and sufferings of women in patriarchal society. Later she moved to short story writing and

novels. Her collections of poetry are -*The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991) and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997). *Black Candle* Chronicles scorched lives of women. It is a collection of poems about women of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. She depicts the sufferings of women in purdah, out-cast or widowed women. Women married against their wish, childless women tortured by their husbands and in-laws and women forced to die on funeral pyres of their husbands. Chitra is a crusader who fights for the cause of women. She says that her living in the USA made her more aware of the sufferings of women in Indian subcontinent. She believes that double standards for men and women prevail both in to the East and the West. As a diasporic woman poet, Chitra portrays the sufferings of women in male dominated society. Her works have been critically well-received especially in the USA She has won many awards for her poetry and fiction. She fuses lyricism, realism, myth and emotional drama very deftly. However, she often denigrates the Indian society and its traditions glorifying the American way of life. She says that it is not enough for women to have a room of her own to write. She needs to prioritize it. She says that women should look out for each other and draw strength from each other.

Moniza Alvi was born in 1954 in Lahore, Pakistan. Her father is a Pakistani and her mother is English. Moniza was taken to England when she was only a few months old. Moniza never learnt her father's language and she always feel sad about it. She felt that her origins were invisible. She feels alienated in England. Neither could she feel at home in Pakistan when she visited int. She felt that she was not the part of Asian community as her mother was English. As she had written a few poems with Asian background, she was taken as a black writer. Her collections of poems are: *The Country at my Shoulder and A Bowl of Warm Air*.

Her poem *Presents from My Aunt* is fairly autobiographical. The girl in the poem is the poet herself at the age of thirteen. The girl says that she is of mixed race. She receives a gift of clothes and jewellery from her Pakistani

aunts. She is fascinated by these gifts but she feels awkward and uncomfortable when she puts them on. She feels more comfortable in denim and corduroy. She tries to connect with her roots in Pakistan but she fails to do so. In her fourth collection *Souls* (2002), she deals with larger Thomas and landscapes. She says,

“And perhaps we are all immigrants
In these towns and villages
and all strangers to ourselves.”²⁹

These poems present the sense of lack of belongingness and fragility of relationship with the self. Her fifth collection *How the stone found its voice* contains poems about her childhood, morning poems about her own experiences of motherhood. These poems are full of diasporic tone of nostalgia, search for her roots and profound sense of displacement and alienation.

Jean Arsanayagam is a very powerful woman writer and poet from Srilanka. She holds that poets have ‘magic’ in their brain. She was born in a Dutch Burgher family in the hill town of Kandy in Sri Lanka. She thought English at a convent school and later at a college in Sri Lanka. She is married to a Tamil Hindu, another minority community in Sinhala-dominated Srilanka. She too also belongs to Dutch Burgher minority who are the offspring of inter-marriages between Dutchmen and women of indigenous communities. Thus she too possesses a split inheritance. She says, “I have suckled on a breast shaped by the genetics of history”.

Jean Arsanayagam’s major poetical works include: *Shooting the Floricans* (1993), *Reddened Water flow Clear* (1991), *Trial by Terror* (1987) *Out of Our Prisons We Emerge* (1987), *A Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems* (1985), *Apocalypse '83* (1984), *Poems of a Season Beginning and a Season over* (1977) *Kindura* (1973) and *Women, All women* (2000). She has also written remarkable prose works. She has written quite phonically reflecting her own life and immediate experiences in violence- torn Sri

Lanka. She calls herself an outsider and therefore she looks at the events very objectively. Amidst chaos, horror, humiliation and loss of home and safety, she experiences a paradoxical sense of freedom, she writes,

“Someone smashed in the door
And gave me my freedom
To walk out into the world
Free, free from the prism of myself.”³⁰

Arsanayagam has faced threats to her life due to her marriage to a Tamil. The nationalist violence seeks to keep minorities like hers’ in their place’ she says.

‘It’s all happened before and will happen again
And we are the onlookers
But now I’m in it
It’s happened to me
At last history has meaning”³¹

Jean Arsanayagam’s poems depict futility of violence and her later poems dwell more intensely on the themes of identity. Her works do not shy away from exploitative accounts of history of colonialism. They show that her birth is not just accidental also inevitability but also something miraculous that hints not at destruction but creation. Her writings reveal a process of ‘becoming’ which destabilizes the unitary concept of identity but it stresses the value of cultural identity.

Anne Ranasinghe, a Jewish girl from Germany arrived in England, Five years later; her parents were murdered in Chelmno, Poland. She trained to be nurse and married a Sri Lanka on Post graduate and later settled down in Sri Lanka. Her husband was appointed as a professor in Medical faculty at Colombo. She studied journalism and in 1971 made debut with a slim volume of poems titled *And the Sun that Sucks The Earth to Dry*. Her other works are *Against Eternity and Darkness* (1985) collection of poems, another collection of poems *Not Even Shadows* (1990) and a collection of

short stories titled *Desire* (1994). She often deals with Nazi Persecution of Jews. In her poem *July 1983*, she alludes to the violent persecution of Sri Lanka's Tamil Minority. She is free from all kinds of illusions and she thinks that there is no safety for human beings anywhere.

“That anything is possible
Any time. There is no safety
In poems or music or even in
Philosophy. No safety
In houses or temples
of any faith.”³²

She says that for her writing a poem to an act of losing herself into the caverns of the mind.

Yasmin Goonratne's poetry is the most technically accomplished among all Sri Lankan poets writing in English. Her first collection *Word, Bird, Motif* appeared in 1971. Her second collection was *The Lizard's Cry and other Poems* (1977). She migrated to Australia in 1972. She explores socio-cultural issues in her poems. In *Lizard's Cry*, she denounces disorder and decay in Srilanka, which she calls “ravaged, looted Kingdom.”

Suniti Namjoshi is an Indian poet and writer born in Bombay. She studied in Poona and then in the USA. She married Gilian Hanscombe and settled in Britain. She is a great champion of minorities who are discriminated against by the society at large. Her allocations of poetry include: *From the Bedside Book of Nightmares* (1984). *The Jackass and the Lady* (1980), *The Authentic Lie* (1982) *Flesh and Paper* (1989) and *Because of India* (1989). She is better known for her tables *Feminist Fables* (1981). *The Conversations of a Cow* (1985), *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988) and so on. Her fables are feministic in tone. They are about women's degraded position in the male dominated society. She has taken up the cause of woman emancipation and woman empowerment. As a diaspora, she is

more concerned about women's problems. Her works are replete with irony, sarcasm, allegory, fables and humorous narratives.

In regional languages of India also, remarkable diaspora literature has been produced. The Punjabi diaspora poetry is quite wide enough to be reduced to be reduced to a particular kind. It has also a variety of tone and approach that we come across in Indian diaspora writing in English. The Punjabis have migrated to Britain, Canada, Sweden and the US in a very large number. Diasporas face alienation for two reasons, displacement from home land and cultural differences that they face in an alien land. In the post-Ghadar phase. Pravasi Punjabi poetry is full of existential angst and sense of desolation and dejection. Later Punjabi Diaspora is primarily economic in nature and therefore their poetry loses much of its patriotic favour and gives way to existentialist concerns. However, it is more academic than poetic. The imagery of 'a bird in the wilderness separated from its flock' is often invokes. Amarjeet Chandan writes,

“All of Sudden the window of the cage opens itself,
The bird stepping outside, sitting at the window starts brooding,
Has it forgotten to fly?
Or did as the sky appears to him a cage?”³⁴

Punjabi diasporic is cited apologetic in nature and guilt ridden. It expresses a sense of remorse and guilt for not being able to stay in their nature land. Many poets see their diaspora state as a journey into a different culture. Amarjeet Chandan, Surjeet Kalsey, Gurcharan Saggy, Shivacharan Gill, Balder Doohere, Avtar Jandialvi, Darshan Dulanavi, Navtej Bharati, Amjer Rode, Gurcharan Rampuri are the major Punjabi diasporic voices writing in Punjabi. However, poets like Amarjeet Chandan hint at post-colonial internationalism where all people mingle as a modern kitchen is an assortment of different things from different places. In spite of global outlook of the modern Punjabi literature, its authenticity lies in its provincial touch and the longing and nostalgia for the homeland make it very appealing.

The Marathi literary diaspora is comparatively educated and high profile group in the developed countries like England, the US or Canada. The Maharashtrians wherever they are make efforts to preserve their language and culture. They hold literary meets and festivals regularly and run some magazines and periodicals. These effects have inspired writers and poets like Shobha Chitre, Meena Prabhu, Asha Damle, Mukund Sonpatki, Dilip Chitre and others. Their writings of course express a sense of dislocation and 'Trishanku' syndrome. Meena Prabhu has settled in England as a doctor. Ajita Kale writes about her experiences and interactions as an observer in the USA as she works as a social health counselor. Shobha Chitre who has settled in the US delves deep into cross-cultural expenses. Her works present nostalgia and also the joys of freedom. The gradual erosion and eventual loss of the mother tongue is a matter of serious concern for many Marathi diasporic writers. Shobha Chitre's writings are deeply reflective, analytical and sometimes autobiographical. In a nutshell, Marathi diasporic literature is analytical, bifocal, reflective and argumentative.

Gujarat is one of the most progressive state in India and Gujaratis have been entrepreneurs from ancient times. Basically Gujaratis are traders and businessmen. They migrated to countries like Africa, England and some Far-East countries. The recent immigration is mainly prompted by education abroad, lucrative jobs and entrepreneurship. Non-Resident Gujaratis have carved a special niche wherever they have gone. Gandhiji in fact became the Mahatma in South Africa where he made his remarkable experiments of truth and non violence. Gujaratis in Britain, US or Africa continued to have strong links with their country and the state. Even today, Gujarat is amply benefitted by the Non-Resident Gujarati's (NRGs) and their active interest in the economy, culture and development of the state.

There are active writers and poets who live abroad and write in Gujarati. Panna Naik, Preeti Sengupta, Vinod Kapasi, Ashraf Dabawala,

Jagdish Dave, Vipul Kalyani and Natwar Gandhi are some of the powerful writers and poets. It is heartening that Gujarati diaspora write poetry rather than fiction or prose. Many Gujarati diaspora writers/poets lived and studied in Gujarat and then moved to England or the USA for better prospects. Some even went to Britain by Africa where their parents or forefathers had settled. Yogesh Patel, Prafull Amin, Jagdish Dave, Panna Naik, Adam Tankarvi, Dayabhai Patel, Jigar Tankarvi, Adil Mansoori, Bharati Vora have contributed remarkably to Gujarati Diaspora writings. Jagdish Dave describes a foreign country as a threatening forest. Memory of homeland plagues the Gujarati diaspora poets quite intensely. They recall the memories of their days in their hometown of friends and the games they used to play. Bharati Vora says that in trying to make 'home' in alien land, she feels that her real home has become alien.

Jagdish Dave says that the Sun has become cold in Britain. The heat and brightness of the Sun is missing in England. It is often very cold and there is snow all around. The Indian weather is nowhere seen in these countries. Jagdish Dave says;

“The sun is half seen, unseen,
Black sun, white sun
Never seen the red sun
Never there is that intoxicating sun.”³⁴

Haroon Patel says very painfully that there are so many good things in the UK but where is love? Where is that intimacy? Adam Tankarvi satirizes the people who imitate the British ways of life and language. He says, “Don't say 'Goodbye' / In Gujarati 'Aavajo' (come again) is spoken.” He says that in England people wipe their tears with tissue papers. In one of his gazals, he says that as soon as Arvind got US visa, his Khadi cap turned into a hat.

Panna Naik writes highly lyrical poetry in free Verse. She is a highly sensitive Gujarati women poet who has voice both diasporas as well as feminist concerns. Her collections of poetry include: *Rang Zarukhe* and

Cherry Blossoms. Her poems have visual as well as sensuous appeal. In one of her poems, she expresses the life of a displaced immigrant in the USA. The poem is titled *A foreigner*.

“A foreigner tells newspapers on pavement
in the middle of the city.
He sells newspapers for eighteen hours.
He sells news papers in alien language
He sells newspapers ignoring the noise of the trains.
He sells newspaper without looking at the faces of the people around
him.
He sells news papers to earn dollars.
He sells newspapers to educate his children in his homeland.
He sells newspapers to make ‘American Dream’ come true
He sleeps for two-to four hours a day –
on unsold newspapers on the pavement.”³⁶

Madhu Rye is a prose writer, dramatist and novelist. His prose is remarkable. He lives abroad but his works are full of nostalgia about his childhood, youth and friends in India. His novel *Kimble Ravenswood* has been made into a film *What is Your Rashi?*. Adil mansoori was born in 1936 in Ahmedabad. He wanted to live in India but a time came when he west almost compelled to leave India for Pakistan. His famous gazal *Male Na Male* shows his deep love for the homeland than is Ahmedabad. However, in 1985, he went to the USA and lived in New York. Adil died on November 6, 2008. He wrote gazals both in Gujarati and Urdu. His poems express deep anguish of alienation, emptiness and boredom. His diasporic voice is clearly heard in these lines:

“Born in Ahmedabad, Childhood spent in Karachi
In Ahmedabad again, and year passed in Jersey.”
And,
“New York, a big city and stress number forty two
But former Bhathiyar Gali of Ahmedabad is the best”

Again he says,
“It’s not difficult to meet Adil,
If he is not in Jersey, he is at certainly at Sarkhej.”

Natawar Gandhi is an income tax expert and an able finance management specialist. He has held a very prestigious post in the US government finance and tax administration. Hailing from Savarkundla, small town in Saurashtra, he had imbibed Gandhina Values from childhood. He is a voracious reader. His favourite writers are Umashankar Joshi and Darshak. He writes in compact metres and mainly practices sonnet form. In the USA, he is known as ‘Nat Gandhi’ but as Suresh Dalal puts it, he can be called ‘Sonnet Gandhi’ of Gujarati literature. His sonnets have appeared in a collection titled *America, America*. As a diaspora, his voice is entirely different. In spite of sentimental display of longing for the homeland, he has witnessed the USA objectively and glorifies it as ‘a cradle of modern prosperity, democracy and equality’. In one of his sonnets, he calls him ‘a child of a city’. He has written a group of sonnets on cities like Washington, San Francisco, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Pittsburgh and New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. He eulogizes Washington as a seat of power and neo-democracy. He calls it the center of arts and culture. In a sonnet on *New York*, he says that all immigrants ultimately become Americans here. It is a city of multicultural, multi-ethnic life.

In another group of sonnets on great personalities of the world, Gandhiji, Lincoln, Churchill, Thoreau, Frost, Emerson, Wallace Stevens, his deep study and knowledge of these great people can be seen. He says in the final complete on Gandhiji that,

“Self-respecting and proud, I bow to none
But I bow to you, on lofty savior of mankind.”³⁷

He pays a rich tribute to Lincoln calling him a great liberator. He calls Churchill ‘an exhibitionist, master of eloquence, warrior, cruel and gigantic’.

He regards Emerson as the great seer and saint of the New Age for the new men and Thoreau, the guide and teacher of Gandhi. In a Sonnet on *After Watching a Play from India*, he criticizes its shallow humour and perverted presentation depicted in the play. In another group of sonnets on America, Natwar Gandhi says that in the entire world, he likes the USA most. However, he criticizes American history that colonized other countries, trampled the weak under its feet and enslaved the Negroes for hundreds of years. He also criticizes American lust for sex and money. Yet, he says that evils are everywhere and so are they in the USA but the people from different countries in the USA are busy experimenting with peace, coexistence and harmony. Decade after decade, new identity of the USA is emerging with the advent of new technology, new knowledge and new experiments. The USA is guiding the entire world in technology, trying to bring happiness and prosperity in the lives of entire mankind. Natwar Gandhi says that the USA is a new destination of a new culture of new humanity. Like Uma Parmeswaran, Natwar Gandhi believes in better assimilation and acceptance of multi-culturism. Uma Parmeswaran while disclosing the *Indian Diaspora in Canada: An overview* offers chronological description of South Asian Diaspora that applies to all diaspora of South Asian origin in the USA, England and Canada. She talks of two distinct phases of emigration: one which took place during colonialism and the other after independence. The second wave immigrants were educated, upwardly mobile people with professional expertise. Many of them wrote in English and some like Natwar Gandhi or Panna Nayak wrote in their mother tongue. There are writers and poets today among the South Asian diaspora who write in their regional languages. This new vernacular literature also needs to be critically evaluated.

At present, there are writers/poets who are born and brought up in England, USA or Canada. Their links with their countries is quite weak and fragile. They form a distinct voice within the multicultural mosaic of the host country. Among the diasporic writers thus, there is an astounding variety with variety of shades. One thing seems to be quite clear that by and by

these writers merge happily with the countries of their adoption and call themselves Americans, Canadians, British and so on but still they write about India or the subcontinent in a very large number. In fact, no writer has produced a major work that can be called the part of mainstream literature of the host country. Whether they accept or adopt the host country or treat it as hostile alien country, they inevitably turn to India either with nostalgia or love for homeland or for critical, satiric denigration of the country they have left behind. Sometimes, they do not celebrate their homeland but mourn its poverty, anarchy, atrocities and innumerable sufferings be it communal riots, earthquake, public scams and so on. These writers draw their raw materials for their writings from India which is and will remain inexhaustible box of chaotic life, sufferings, uncertainties and accidents and also of love, longing and joys.

Lakshmi Gill who lives in Canada writes in her poem *Out of Canada* that she cannot die in Canada but she would like to “sit at the foot hills of the Himalayas / and leave hard Canada for the hardy Canadians” The USA, Canada and England may provide financial security, order and safety, even economic prosperity but they fail to provide the traditional support that family and faith bring and the consequence is obviously the sense of isolations and alienation. This way or that, the sense of exile is perceptible in all diasporic writing and it is the key ingredient of the diaspora.

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CHAPTER III

Diasporic sensibility in the poetry of Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt



Meena Alexander



Sujata Bhatt

CHAPTER - 3

Diasporic sensibility in the poetry of Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt

"When the time came for her to learn all the knowledge from her past lives returned to her, as wild geese in autumn to the Ganga River".

- Kalidasa, *Kumarsambhava* 1:30

"It seems to me that lyric poem is a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world. To make a lyric poem I have to enter into a dream state. But at the same time, almost by virtue of that disconnect, it becomes a very intense location to reflect the world."

- Meena Alexander. *Fault Lines*

"Every time I think I've forgotten,
I think I've lost the mother tongue,
It blossoms out of my mouth."

-Sujata Bhatt (From *Search for My Tongue*)

Modern age is the age of prose. As science and technology advance, poetry seems to be pushed aside. Many people think that poetry is irrelevant and useless. In the age of information technology, many think that it has lost its significance. Reports say that poetry is the least read form of literature and students do not like to study poetry. Teachers do not like to teach poetry. Those who teach poetry paraphrase it instead of reciting poetry. This has led to the loss of ear for poetry. Publisher does not like to publish poetry as there is no market for it. In such a scenario, it is quite relevant to discuss the role of poetry and its validity. Is science anti-thesis of poetry? In fact, poetry is a higher science. Science was always considered a part of philosophy in the earlier times. Galileo, Descartes and Newton regarded God as 'the chief mathematician of the universe'. For Einstein also,

a serious scientist is always a religious man. He advocated that scientist should never forget man and his fate while working on diagrams and equations.

Ancient Indian sages were also endowed with scientific spirit. Their questionings were highly rational and scientific. Later Buddha and Charvaka also made inquiries that were promoted by reason and scientific spirit. It is a fact that the best thinking and poetic sensibility went hand in hand in India. Gandhi's law of non-violence and equal distribution have scientific basis. Lord Buddha is called not only Buddha the enlightened but also Buddha the Compassionate. Total man is a fine amalgam of reason and emotions.

Swami Vivekananda saw a very scientific connection between science and morality. He said that as long as even a single insect lived on earth, he too lived. He saw and understood the unity of life among all creatures. Lord Buddha told his disciple Ananda that till a single man suffered in the world, his search for 'Nirvana' was meaningless. In fact, life contains everything. It refuses to fall into categories and compartments like science, literature, philosophy and so on. Thoreau did not feel lonely and exclaimed: 'why should I feel lonely? Is not my planet in the milky way?' Henry Vaughan too proclaimed with pure delight.

"I saw the eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light".

Sigmund Freud had to admit that it was not he but poets who discovered the 'unconscious'. William Wordsworth declared in his poetic manifesto that, "poetry is the impassioned expression of all sciences". Science limits itself to physical world while poetry amalgamates desperate experiences. S.T. Coleridge called it esemplastic function of imagination that organizes the disparate elements into the whole. Ambiguity is one of the characteristics of the poetry. It uses words in connotation manner. It uses images and symbols to represent ideas or feelings. Wallace Stevens, the famous American poet said that poetry should have certain amount

ambiguity. Poetry is both pragmatic as well as transcendental. As Mathew Arnold says, it is a criticism of life and therefore it encompasses everything that is included in LIFE.

In modern time, poetry has played the role of an instrument of change. It cannot connive at the realities of life. It must disrobe and dismantle if necessary. The new poets carry wounds in their hearts. These are the wounds of the teeming toiling millions. Their hearts bled for those who suffer, those who are deprived and exploited, those who are alienated and exiled. Tolstoy believed that art must have communicability. It must never be the hand maiden of aristocratic tastes.

True poetry rises above the clamour of the chaos, violence and trivialities of life. It teaches us how to live meaningfully. Albert Camus said that there is only one philosophical question: whether to commit suicide. Further he says the point is not live and not to escape from life. Gulzar gives a time portrait of a poet in the following words:

"Seated on a branch of the mulberry tree
weaving threads of silk
Uncovering each moment
Picking each leaf
A mad man, listens to every breath
unravels each and wraps it around his body
A prisoner of his own breath
This poet of silken sounds will one day die
choked by his own threads." ¹

Poetry is the loftiest form of literature. It is the supreme utterance that mankind is endowed with. The soul of all arts is enjoyment but it must be disinterested and lofty transcending the physical and the material world. However, if this enjoyment loses its touch with life and humanity, it loses its worth. Man possesses knowledge which leads him to inner freedom, the freedom of mind and soul. His love for beauty transcends utility. Men as

well as animals need to express their feelings of pain or pleasures. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with self preservation. This surplus finds outlet in the creation of art and human civilization is built upon this surplus. Rabindranath Tagore in his essay *What is Art?* remarks,

"The principal object of art, also, being the expression of personality, and not of that which is abstract and analytical, it necessarily uses the language of picture and music. This has led to a confusion of our thought that the object of art is the production of beauty: where as beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance".²

Mathew Arnold in his famous *The Study of Poetry* says that poetry is the religion of the future and more and more people will turn to it for the understanding of life. Science is complete and even dangerous without poetry. He prophesied that what now passes as religion and philosophy will be accepted by poetry. Arnold gives the highest status to poetry when he remarks,

"The future of poetry is immense because in poetry where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as our time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact, it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for the poetry, the idea is everything, the rest is the words of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion today in its unconscious poetry"³

R.W. Emerson, the famous American poet, Philosopher and transcendentalist puts poets on the highest pedestal. He says that among the incomplete men, the poet stands as a complete man. He is isolated from his contemporaries by the virtue of truth and art. All people need to express themselves and without expression, man is only a half man. Emerson says,

"The universe has three children, born at one time which reappear under different names in every system of thought whether they be called cause, operation and effect; or more poetically, Jove, Plato, Neptune; or theologically, the Father, the Spirit and the Son; but which we will call here the Knower, the Doer and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good and for the love of beauty".⁴

Emerson calls the poet a Sayer, a namer who represents beauty. He is sovereign standing erect at the centre. Poetry existed before everything else. The poet is a beholder of ideas. He is an announcer and proclaimer of the necessary and the eternal. A true poet is never detached from life. It is the detachment from life and God that makes things ugly. It is the task of the poet to reattach things to nature and the whole. He uses forms according to life and not life according to forms. He does not stop at facts but employs them as signs. The poet is the Namer and Language Maker. He names them after their appearances or essence. Language is fossil poetry. Emerson says:

"Poets are thus liberating gods, Men have really got a new sense and found within their world another world, or nest of worlds, for the metamorphosis once seen, we divine that it does not stop"⁵

Poets are free and they have the capacity of making others free. Their basic concern is man because man is the Supreme Being among all creatures. An Indian poet, Chandidas said that man is above all being and no being ever surpasses him. New poetry also aims at a abolition of the self to achieve higher self. It destroys the language in order to recreate a language. To modern man, God is irrelevant because He is now replaced by man. New poetry is a protest against the predicament of man. Poetry may not be able to provide cure for social ills but it is not a mere verbal game. New poets attempt to present human beings, their anguish and alienation

from their roots. New poetry is an endeavor to discover the true identity of man. The questions that confront modern man are - To Whom does man belong? Does he really belong to any place, anything, any anchor? For whom does he write? Does his writing have any impact on betterment of humanity?

Poetry aims at seeking the answers to these questions. Man belongs to the world, the universe and his anchorage lies in his fellowmen. His ultimate salvation is not in abstract idea of soul but in being a part of the humankind with all its ordeals, sufferings and struggles. His salvation is not freedom from the world of sufferings humanity. In fact, it lies in his being with them and for them. In his very identification with all creatures, he will find his home, the home that we call 'Soul or God'. Poetry, above all, is a door for this understanding and realization. In my research, I have undertaken the study of poetry of some diasporic women poets who are highly sensitive to the sufferings of humanity. Their sense of exile is not personal but universal.

These women poets have been called here 'Cassandras in exile' because like Cassandra, they are condemned to speak out but often not listened to or believed. These women poets belong to South Asian region who have migrated to other countries and have experienced the sense of dislocation and displacement from their roots. Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and Chitra Banerjee Divakarani are Indian women poets who have lived abroad. Moniza Alvi is a young poet from Pakistan and Jean Arsanayagam is a Dutch Burgher women poet who has experienced double exile being a woman married to Tamil and Dutch Burgher in Sinhala dominated Srilanka.

The myth of Cassandra is well known in Greek literature. It is one of the saddest tales of ancient classical literature. Cassandra was a princess of the legendary City of Troy; the daughter of king Priam and Queen Hecuba. She was so charming that she attracted both gods and mortals alike. Apollo, the Sun God lusted after Cassandra and to win her, he promised to bestow

upon her the gift of prophecy. Unable to resist the gift, Apollo offered, she relented but she was not at all convinced that she wanted to take Apollo as her lover. Apollo gave her the gift of prophecies and taught her how to use them. However, once his promise was fulfilled, she backed out and refused to give her body to Apollo. Furious at being rejected by a mere mortal, Apollo decided to punish her. He could not take back the gift he had given her, he could alter it. So he leveled a curse upon her that she would be able to foresee the future but no one would believe her. On the contrary, they would call her a liar. The cruelty lay in the fact that she always saw the truth but could not communicate it.

True to his word, Cassandra could foresee the future but each time, she tried to warn people in advance, her words were ignored and labeled as a liar. Her father was now ashamed of her daughter's supposed madness and pronounced her insane. She was locked inside her own chambers. He even went to the extent of declaring that she was dead. One of the Cassandra's most important prophecies involved the fall of Troy at the hands of the Greeks and the Trojan Horse that caused the downfall of Troy.

Cassandra managed to escape from Troy eluding atrocities of the Greeks. She hid within the temples of the Goddess Athena who promised to protect her. However, Ajax found her there clinging helplessly to the statue of Athena. Ajax forced himself upon her and for this act, he was cursed by Athena that he would never return home. Ajax died with the crash of his ship against in the rocks in mighty ocean. Labeled as liar and insane, Cassandra gave into her fate and accompanied Agamemnon as his concubine. Upon their return, Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra greeted the couple warmly embracing Cassandra. However, Cassandra could foresee her own death at the hands of Clytemnestra alongside Agamemnon.

Cassandra represents the fate of women in male dominated society. Greek society did not recognize the woman's right to say no. She has been portrayed as insane as she refused to play by the rules established by undeserving gods. Cassandra symbolizes an impassioned outburst by the

woman who feels the terrible burden of her gift of poetic speech. Her knowledge is apocalyptic, her urgency daemonic. For her, poetry assaults and afflicts her, setting her off from human kind and rendering her the doomed and solitary witness of destruction and death. This suggests that poetry from its hidden source creates speech which is profoundly 'other' and 'opposed' to the received notions of men. In Cassandra, the poet can see herself who recognizes a culture's 'tricks of lust and pride'. Cassandra denigrates the hierarchy of traditional authority and disrupts allegiance to male gods. Her role is to create the poem as prophecy. The society tries to paralyze its female poets who through the intensity of their language create songs like screams. Cassandra's mad screaming voice differs from other prophets of Greek mythology. It expresses the anguish of a woman and a poet who foresees impending dangers and death and tries to warn humanity of these disasters only to be unheeded and ignored.

In fact, poets both men and women suffer like Cassandra. They are taken as mad and their cries go unheeded. The famous author of *The Mahabharata*, Ved Vyas had written that he had been crying out loudly raising both his hands but people never took him seriously. This is probably the destiny of all poets, seers and all wise men. The diasporic women poets of my dissertation are prophetic in the sense that they cry against the evils of terrorism, racialism, war, ethnic violence and gender discrimination. Like Cassandra, they say 'no' to easy complacency of our age. They speak out fearlessly and boldly. These diasporic women poets are displaced from their Troy and experience the agonies of exile and the loss of language and communication in one or the other way. Like Cassandra, they denigrate the hierarchy of traditional authority, the set stereotypes and political and cultural subordination. They oppose false cultural pretensions of their own countries and also the racial hegemony of their host countries.

Meena Alexander (1951) is a genuine diasporic voice expressing her own lived diasporic experiences in her poetry- uprooting and exile, migrant memories and trauma, separation and loneliness - all the way from India to

Sudan and USA. Mary Elizabeth Alexander was born in 1951 on February 17. She christened Mary Elizabeth but she has been called "Meena" since her birth and in her fifteenth year, she officially changed her name to Meena. It was not a mere act of defiance but of liberation. She writes:

"Mary Elizabeth" I was baptized, the names of my two grandmothers strung together, anglicized Mariamma and Eli as befit our existence in the aftermath of colonial era whose English was all powerful. Fifteen years old in Khartoum, I changed my name to Meena, what everyone knew me as, but just as important to me, the name under which I started to write poems".⁶

Her appa was dismayed. He felt that she would be confused in public records and no one would know who she was. But she felt that in the change of name, she was her truer self, stripped free of the colonial burden. In Sanskrit, Meena meant 'Fish' and in Urdu, it means 'enamel work or jewellery' and in Arabic, it meant 'port'. Meena's father George Alexander had a job in the Central Government while her mother was a house wife. Her maternal grandmother Ilya was a distinguished Keralite. Her grandmother was a distinguished woman in Kerala who had gained M.A. in English literature in those days from Presidency College, Madras and joined YMCA which was quite active in India during the early decades of the 20th Century.

She had travelled extensively visiting Peking, London and other places. She was married at the age of twenty eight to a Nationalist and a follower of 'Mahatma Gandhi'. After her marriage, she diverted her energy to work for freedom of women, children's education and social work. She was quite active in removal of untouchability in the early years of 1930's. Mahatma Gandhi had visited their house in Kottayam in 1934. Meena had two sisters Anna and Elsa both younger to her. Meena's early childhood was spent in Allahabad and Tiruvella. Meena says that though she was born in Allahabad, it was not her home. Tiruvella, her mother's home and

Kozencheri, her appa's home together composed her nadu, the dark soil of self. Nadu in Malayalam is a word for home and homeland.

In 1956, the Sudan gained independence and asked the Third world countries for assistance in establishing its government and administrative set up. Meena's father applied for a job with the Sudanese Government and he was selected for the job. The family moved to Khartoum where Meena spent her childhood years and days of youth between five to eighteen. However, the family used to visit Kerala each summer. Her journey to Sudan was the first ocean crossing which she felt could be described as figuration of death, of loss of sense and being blotted out. The sands of the Sahara swept into Khartoum city. This was her first shock of transition. She received her degree from Khartoum University and they moved to England to study at Nottingham University where she earned her Ph.D.

She returned to India where she worked at Delhi University, Central Institute of Hyderabad and Hyderabad University. It was in Hyderabad she met her husband David Lelyveld. In 1979, they moved to New York City where they live with their two children Adam Kuruvilla Lelyveld (b.1980) and Swati Mariam Lelyveld (b.1986) Meena Alexander's husband David Lelyveld, a Jewish scholar in a history of India and South Asia. Meena Alexander teaches at Hunter College and at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Meena Alexander began her literacy career at the tender age of ten when she started writing poetry. Her first book, a single lengthy poem *The Bird's Bright Wing* (1976) was published in Calcutta. She is better known as poet but she has attempted other genres of literature also. Her works include:

1. *The Bird's Bright Wing* (1976)
2. *Without Place* (1978)
3. *I Root my Name* (1977)
4. *Stone Roots* (1980)
5. *The Storm* (1989)

6. *The Night Scene, the Garden* (1989)
7. *House of Thousand Doors* (1988)
8. *River and Bridge* (1996)
9. *Manhattan Music* (1977) (A novel)
10. *Nampally Road* (1991) (A Novel)
11. *Fault Lines* (A Memoir) (1993 & 2003)
12. *The Shock of Arrival: Reflection on postcolonial Experience: A study on Romanticism* (1996)
13. *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (1989)
14. *Illiterate Heart* (2002)
15. *Raw Silk* (2004)

Meena Alexander's poems and prose writings have been widely published in magazines in the USA, UK and India. Some of her poems and prose writings have been translated into Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, French, Italian, Spanish and German. Meena Alexander is an internationally acclaimed poet. She truly represents the history of global culture. She expresses her first hand experiences of how it looks and feels to have a split identity. Most of her writing explores themes of migrant, displacement, exile, multiple, identities and allegiances. Some of these themes are introduced in her early works of poetry - *The Bird's Bright Wing* (1976), *Without Place* (1978), *I root my Name* (1977) and *Stone Roots* (1980). These themes continue to appear in her subsequent works also. As the title of many of her books reveal, her major preoccupation is the reason for roots through evocation of local landscapes, events, persons, family members and events. In her later collections of poems, she deals with the issues of defining a strong female self especially through matrilineal memories. Her grandfather Ilya, her grandmother and their house in Tiruvella dominate her memories. Ilya was a sort of intellectual social reformer who was quite close to E.M.S. Nambudripad. Her grandmother Kunjn was also a powerful woman, highly educated Christian who adored Gandhian values. She was quite liberal minded and worked for women's liberation through education.

Meena Alexander recalls her:

"I was filled with longing for an ancestral figure who would allow my mouth to open, permit me to speak. I skipped a whole ring of life and made up a grandmother figure, part ghost, part flesh. She was drawn over what I had learnt of grandmother Kunju. Imagined her: a sensitive, cultured woman; a woman who had a tradition, and a history - precisely what I lacked; a woman who had lived to witness the birth pangs of a Nation" ⁷

Meena had never known her as she had died and untimely death. She was like a Sapphire to her buried in a strip of earth or the shifting aureole of pollen on a Champak flower'. She had gleaned facts and events of her life from Ilya and other family members. She was quite close to Ilya who narrated the stories from *the Bible* and *the Mahabharata*. She says that it was he who nourished her intellectually and emotionally. He instilled into her a restless idealism that the earth could be transformed and the world could become a place of peace, love and happiness.

Meena saw her grandmother's face through Ilya's eyes. Recalling the tragic death of her dear Ilya, Meena Alexander writes:

"Had Ilya lived longer, I might have outgrown that world, like a skin that no longer fit, like a garment that was too tight. But as it was, the torment of his death plunged us into grief and rage. I think neither amma nor I have ever gotten over it. With the death and duties and loss of cardamom and rubber estates, our lives changed. A whole world shivered and cracked. The hoarse sounds of his last breathing, the rattle in his throat as died, filled my ears." ⁸

Ilya had told Meena about partition of India and the tragic holocaust that took place then. He said that it was good she was born after those terrible days. He also described to her Gandhiji's fast unto death to stop

violence that took place during the partition. Ilya said that he too fasted on some days and wore Khadi, a hand spun and hand woven cloth made by ordinary hands. All such childhood incidents nourished and shaped Meena Alexander's poetic sensibilities. She has recorded all these memories in her memoir *Fault Lines* (2003). Her memoir helps us in understanding her works better, which are marked by the sense of loss, the pain of exile and dislocation.

In *House of Thousand Doors* (1988) is a collection of poetry mixed with imaginary letters to her grandmother and mother and short lyrical prose pieces. Meena Alexander tries to seek her identity through the figures of her maternal grandmother Kunju who defied the dictates of conventional feminine behavior and became an influential political activist. Her poems are often personal as well as political as in 'Art of Pariahs' from *River and Bridge* (1996). In this poem, she deals with the issue of racial tensions in the United States:

"Back against the kitchen store Draupadi sings;
In my head Beirut still burns-
The unseen of Nubia, God's upper kingdom the Rani of Jhansi,
transfigured, raising her sword are players too. They have entered with
me to North America and share these walls'.⁹

Meena Alexander is one of the foremost diasporic poets today. Her writing is lyrical, pageant and sensual, dealing with large themes including ethnic intolerance, terrorism, fanaticism and interracial tensions. Her poems are intensely self-conscious and with minimum of words, she evokes layers of meaning. For her, poetry has an important role to play in a modern violence-ridden world. She says in an interview with Ruth Maxey in *Kenyon Review*:

"In a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some ways to reconcile us to our world and to allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist."¹⁰

As child, Meena wanted to be a circus performer after she had seen circus artists doing balancing acts in Gemini Circus. Then her grandfather and mother wanted her to be a medical doctor and her father who was a scientist encouraged her to be a physicist. However, Meena turned to poetry at the age of eleven or twelve. For her, it was the music of survival. She admits that there is an inner voice that speaks to her. She feels that there is a girl child that resides inside her and she refuses to die. She writes in a chapter titled *Lyric in a time of Violence* in *Fault Lines*:

"It seems to me that the lyric poem is a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world. To make a lyric poem, I have to enter into a dream state. But at the same time, almost by virtue of that disconnect, it becomes a very intense location to reflect on the world."¹¹

Meena Alexander poetry is marked by diasporic sensibility which finds highly emotion, charge expression in sensual, lyrical and metaphoric language. She has undergone multiple identities in multiple places. Her poems express her own lived experiences-uprooting and exile, migrant memories traveling to different places in India, Sudan and America. She has lived in different cities and towns like Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri, Pune, Khartoum, London, New York, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Trivandrum etc. In her memoir *Fault Lines* she writes about ethnicity and writing of poetry. The whole chapter *Real Places or How Sense Fragments: Thoughts on Ethnicity and Writing of Poetry* is a manifesto of her relationship with poetry. She asks herself: who am I? Where am I? When am I? These are the questions all diasporic writers are required to mix amidst violent densities of place. In modern times, world overlap and one has co-existed in fluid diasporic world. The biggest challenge for a creative writing is to make a real integration between one's personal history and the experience in alien countries.

Meena Alexander asks:

"What does it mean to carry one's house on one's back"? ¹²

In America, she has to explain herself all the time, her origin, her occupation and so on. As a poet, she has to explain whether she is a poet writing in America. If she is, is she an American poet like Robert Frost or Wallace Stevens? or is she an Asian-American poet. She feels that everything that comes to her is hyphenated and incomplete. She says that she is a women poet, a women poet of color, a south Indian Woman poet who makes up lines in English a past colonial language as she waits for the red lights to change on Broadway. ¹³

The multicultural world in America has been described very poignantly in her poem *News of the World*.

“We must always return
to poems for new of the world
or polish for the lack
Strip it
block it with blood
the page is not enough
unless the sun rises in it
Old doctor wilily writes
crouched on a stop
in Paterson, New Jersey
I am torn by light
She cries into her own head
The players fields of death
are far from me. In Cambodia I carried
my mother's head in a sack
and ran three days and nights
through a rice field
Now I pick up vegetables
from old sacking and straighten
them on crates: tomatoes
burning plums, cabbages hard

as bone. I work in Manhattan.
The subway corrupts me
with crates the robed Muslims sell
with white magazines
with spittle and gum
I get lost underground
By onkee stadium
I stumble out
hands loaded down
fists clenched into balls
A man approaches
much on his shirt
his head, a battering ram he knows who I am
I stall:
the tracks flash
with a thousand suns ¹⁴

Meena Alexander says that Frantz Fanon speaks of the barbed wire that exists in a colonized state. She believes that this "zone of occult instability" must be expressed in poetry of the diaspora which will act as a process of decolonization. The Asian Americans grapple with violence, disorder and injustice and they are bartered in capitalist society of the West. Wallace Stevens said somewhere that imagination is a form of violence from within that presses against the actual, the violence from without. Meena Alexander says that in America, the diasporic poets and artists press against the barbed wire of the racialism.

Meena Alexander says that people call poets 'the creators of that small despised art'. As a poet, she picks up strands of memories and evokes them all. She feels that her ethnicity demands it. Past memories haunt her. In India, everything is colored with hierarchy, authority, and traditions. No one feels its burden. Only in America, she read about the pain of the post colonial heritage and the sufferings of women in India she says:

"There is a violence in the very language,
American English, that we have to face, even
as we work to make it ours, decolonize
it so that it will express the truth of
bodies beaten and banned. After all, for
such as we are the territories are not free.
The world is not open. That endless
space the emptiness of the American
sublime to worse than a lie. It
does ceaseless damages to the imagination.
But it has taken me ten years in this
country even to get to think it ." ¹⁵

In America, she came face to face with subtle form of racism and violence. She felt that true poetry must figure out this violence and give expression to it. For a writer, there are many kinds of death for example the loss of one's language or the forgetfulness of the body. In her collection of poems *House of a Thousand Doors*, the past took the form of an ancestor, a grandmother figure. She wanted to tear herself free from the past but it sucked her back in its vortex. Meena Alexander says that her ethnicity as an Indian American and in broader sense, an Asian American requires her to hold on to past resisting fracturing. For her, poetry has a higher role to play. She writes:

"The struggle for social justice, for human
dignity, is for each of us. Like ethnicity,
like the labor of poetry, it is larger
than any single person, or any single
voice. It transcends individualism.
It is shape by forces that well up
out of us, chaotic, immensely
powerful forces that disorder the brittle
boundary lines we create, turn us
towards a light, a truth, whose immensity,

far from being mystical-in the sense
of a pure thing far away, a distance
shining - casts all our actions into
relief, etches out lines into art." ¹⁶

River and Bridge (1996) contains poems that express nostalgia for homeland, memories of childhood and also monotonous life of a migrant in the USA. In a poem *Softly My Soul*, the poet describes the American Milieu:

"Softly my Soul, softly my soul o so softly
the herons have fled, but the planes keep coming.
Above Liberty's torch the sky is pink
And George Washington would laugh in his sleep
to mark the gazelles on Fifth Avenue
tiny miniskirts hoisted to their thighs." ¹⁷

In *Everything strikes Loose*, the poet laments over the bygone when there was 'grace in the young poet's mind, leaves flickered in the golden Pamba river.

"Now the river trickles
through low hills
it tastes of childhood
the boats fly no flags
the races are all done
and flat barges driven by men
bear cinnamon, cloves, dried pepper" ¹⁸

Women poet face double burden of the diasporic destiny. They face hostile racialism and displacement in alien countries and at the same time they suffer at the hands of patriarchal society. In addition to these, women poets also face the borders that their bodies create- racial as well as sexual borders. As a teenager in Khartoum, Meena kept journals that contained quotes from Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, Wallace Stevens and her own

poetry. Her mother insisted that women should accept the limitations imposed by their bodies and honour their femininity. Arranged marriage was a narrow gate that all women had to enter and learn certain skills required to run a household. In Kozencheri, girls could not get out without proper escorts. They were often molested in market places of Kerala. Meena had heard that sometimes women committed suicide to do away with their shameful bodies. These terrible images haunted her mind in her childhood. In her poem *Passion*, she poignantly describes the life of a woman:

“I am she
the women after giving birth

life
to give life
torn and hovering

as bloodied fluids
baste the weakened flesh

For her
there are no words
no bronze, no summoning.

I am she
smeared with ash
from the black God's altar

I am
the sting of love
the blood hot flute
the face
carved in the window,
watching as the god set sail
across the waters

risen from the cape
Sri Krishna in a painted Catamaran.

I am she
tongue less in rhapsody
the stars of glass
nailed to the southern sky

Ai ai

She cries

They stuffed
her mouth with rags

and pulled her
from the wooden bed

and thrust her
to the broken floor.

I,I.¹⁹

River and Bridge, the title poem of the collection portrays the pain of crossing borders. The poet describes her new life in New York in a landscape of mist and burnished trees she says:

“But Homer knew it and Vyasa too; black river and bridge summon these whose stinging eyes crises cross red lights, metal implements, battlefields: birth is always bloody”.²⁰

In a poem *Muse*, Meena Alexander laments the ruin of 'our language' and the sense of having 'no home'. She says:

"Our language is in ruins
vowels impossibly sharp
broken consonants of bone
She has no home". ²¹

Muse (2) is a poem in sequel to the former poem in which she continues with the same theme. She says:

"creatures of here and there
we keep scurrying
Madurai, Manhattan, who cares?

When she turns it is etched on her:
Words, sentences, maps,
her skin burns bright;

Sheer aftermath". ²²

Meena Alexander has written several poems on the burden of English and illiteracy in one's own language. In fact, she knew several language Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, French, and English but she always felt that English had alienated her from what she was born to; the language of intimacy. When she was working at the Central Institute of English at Hyderabad, there were lots of discussion and debate about the status of English in India. It was argued that English was superior to any other Indian language as it could be a powerful medium for technical knowledge and modern science and commerce.

However, everyone felt that the future of English depends upon its ability to the needs of the masses in India. From Susie Tharu who had been her close friend, Meena Alexander learnt about the strength of femaleness, resistance and possibility of political activism. Jayanth Mahapatra, the famous Indian English poet from Orissa taught her to understand the poet's bond with place and how to accept the ravages of time. She always felt that

colonialism was quite intrinsic to the burden of English in India. She too felt that she was robbed of literacy in her own mother tongue. She feels that multiple speeches surround her making her dream of barbed wire. In her poem *Night Scene*, the Garden, she talks of "ferocious alphabets of flesh", the burden of female body. There are images of blasted terrain of the West Banks, bombed out streets of Aden, the ravaged hill sides of Sri Lanka and the killing of the people in the field of Punjab. She writes:

"My back against barbed wire
snagged and coiled to belly height
on granite posts
glittering to the moon

No man's land
No women's either
I stand in the middle
of my life.

out of earth's soft
and turbulent core
a drum sounds
summoning ancestors
They rise
through puffs of grayish dirt
scabbed skins slit
and drop from them

They dance
a top the broken spurts
of stone

They scuff
the drum skins

with their flight heels" ²³

Later in the same poem, she summons "ferocious alphabets of flesh" to "splinter and raze her page". She cries out:

"Come ferocious alphabets of flesh
splinter and raze my page

That out of the dumb
and bleeding part of me

I claim my heritage." ²⁴

In a poem titled *Lost Language*, she expresses an intense longing for the lost language. She writes:

"It comes in flight
towards me
brushing against
an old stone wall
father's father raised
Laanguage so fine
it can not hold the light
for long and beats
as water might..." ²⁵

Meena Alexander searches for her own identity amidst a world that always labels and identifies people by race color and nationality. Even her son Adam had an experience of this kind when a man asked him: "what are you?" Adam, the son of mix heritage, chose the identity him as neither American nor Indian but a Jedi knight. In a poem *Brown Skin, what Mask?*, she describes a free make over in America only to turn herself into "a hyphenated thing":

"No flim-flam now; card sharp, street wise
I fix my heels at Paul's shoe place for a dollar fifty

get a free make over at Macy's eyes smart, lips shine
Shall I be a hyphenated thing, Macaulay's Minutes
and melting pot theories notwithstanding?

Shall I bruise my skin, burn up into
She Who Is No Color. whose longing is a crush
of larks shivering without sound?" ²⁵

Meena Alexander deals with the theme of violence, war, terrorism and intolerance very poignantly. In the poem *The young of Tiananmen*, the sacrifices of the young men and women of China have been eulogized. The description of the rolling tanks, coughing guns is highly evocation. The poet writes:

"Tanks rolled, guns coughed
tear gas choked them in pitiful
sobs: the young of Tiananmen
from a far country I sing

As blood swallowed them whole
they become our blood
as the sun swallowed them whole
they become children of the sun

What ink can inscribe them now
the young of Tiananmen." ²⁷

Safdar Hashmi, a Young Marxist playwright was beaten to death on January 1, 1989 while performing a play titled *Hallabol* in support of striking women. Two days after this death, the players of the Jane Natya Manon with Safdar's wife Moloysree returned to the spot and performed the play. There are two poems in the *River and Bridge* that deal with the death of

Safdar Hashmi; one *For Safdar Hashmi Beaten to Death Just outside Delhi* and the other addressed Safdar's brave wife Moloysree. Safdar held the door tight so that other actors might escape while he was attacked by armed goons.

In a poem addressed to Moloysree, Meena Alexander describes the place where Safdar Hashmi was beaten to death:

"There
there they beat him by the tap
on scalp and skull with bits of rack
lathis tipped with steel, wrought iron
broken from the construction site.

You point out the spot, so silently
drawing your palms apart as if your
soul and his still hung on a thread

So hot only the dead could work
that needle, crawl through its eye" ²⁸

The poet expresses the tyranny of patriarchy and colonization in many of her poems. Compulsory acquisition of a colonial language splits the subject's body and her sense of self. Her collection *Illiterate Heart* (2002), won the 2002 PEN open Book Award. The book opens with the ten couplets work *Provenance* meaning "the place of origin" in two of Alexander's languages French and English. The central theme of the collection is how identities are shaped by languages and they merge with and inscribe female bodies. In a poem titled *Fragments* Alexander writes:

"I want to write:
The treasure bursting in to bloom

I felt it, though it did not come in that particular way, the sentence
end-stopped
could sense come in feverish script
finicky with rhyme, sharp as a wave?." ²⁹

Three languages loom large in the poet's psyche English, French and Malayalam. She describes the impact of these three languages on her body and mind.

"What beats in my heart? who can tell?
I can not tense my writing hand around
that burnt hole of sense, figure out the
quick step of syllables.
On pages where I read the words of Gandhi
and Marx, saw the light of the Gospels,
the script started to quiver and flick.
Later grew fins and tails
swords sprang from the hips of consonants
vowels grew ribbed and sharp
pages bound in to leather
turned the color of ink
My body flew apart:
wrist, throat, elbow, thigh,
knee where a male rose
bone scapula, blunt cut hair,
then utter stillness as a white sheet
dropped on nostrils and neck.
Black milk of childhood drunk
and drunk again!" ³⁰

However, she says that by using these languages and creating poetry in them, she is able to bind body and self into a unified whole. It is a

movement towards self-definition. The language is both cruel and painful but also heavenly. It is a means of subjugation but also of liberation. In a poem *An Honest Sentence*, the poet turns to Greek mythology of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, the sacrificial lamb who is sacrificed by her own father. She stands for both a mythological figure and a violated woman. Her vocal cords having been cut, she unable to utter words. The poet identifies herself Iphigenia who like the tragic Greek mythological figure tried to "forge an honest sentence" (53). Iphigenia the poet and 'women' merge and emerge as injured voiceless sacrificial lamb of human history - *The Female*. In Meena Alexander's writings women is brought back to life again and again.

In a poem *Like Mirabai*, she refers the poem expresses the longing of Meerabai who left Mewar in Rajasthan former the poem expresses the longing of the speaker in the poem to leave an alien land forever. She says:

"History makes me hoarse! she tried,
"I'll never set foot in a house again like Meerabai!"
And by the river, she set her clattering burden down. ³¹

Meena Alexander, on seeing a painting by Edward Hopper at Whitney, experiences the loneliness of living in a flesh of a woman.

"Still nothing comes out of her mouth -
I am she, I want to cry
to the thin air of Nyack, Hopper painted on
pale tremulous ground, stiff meadow grass.
The loneliness of living in the flesh
draws us out, half naked, to the edge." ³²

Meena Alexander is a highly sensitive poet who does not remain silent even on sensitive issues like 9/11, Babri Masjid, Godhra Carnage and Hindu-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad. *San Andreas Fault* is a long poem in five

parts. In part IV *Package of Dreams*, she refers to tragic lot of women in human history:

"Late at night in half moon bay
hair loosed to the glow of traffic lights
I slit the moist package of my dreams.

Females still, quite metamorphic
I flowed into Kali ivory tongued, skulls nipping my breasts
Durga lips etched with wires astride an electric tiger
Draupadi born of flame betrayed by five brothers stripped
of silks in the banquet hall of shame.

In the ghostly light of those women's eyes
I saw the death camps at our century' end.

A woman in Sarajevo shot to death
as she stood pleading for pot of milk,
a scrap of bread, her red scarf swollen
with lead hung in a cherry tree.

Turks burnt alive in the new Germany
a grandmother and two girls
cheeks puffed with smoke
as they slept in striped blankets
bought new to keep out the cold." ³³

And then she refers to violent riots and massacre that took place in the name of Lord Rama who is called Karuna Nidhan and abode of mercy. It is a pity that people kill one another in the name of religion and God even today:

"In Ayodhya, in Ram's golden name
hundreds hacked to death, the domes

of Babri Masjid quivering as massacres begin,
the rivers of India rise mountainous,
white veils of the dead, dhotis, kurtas, saris,
slippery with spray, eyed from their bloodiness." ³⁴

No Man's Land is a poem about the aftermath of war, women washing their thighs in the bloodied river. The poem contains highly evocative, moving images:

"Infants crawl
sucking dirt from sticks
whose blunt ends
smack of elder flesh
and ceaseless bloodiness"
And,
"Women wash their thigh
in bloodied river water
over and over
they wipe their flesh
In stunned
immaculate gesture
figures massed with light" ³⁵

Mena Alexander met Ramu Gandhi in 1974. He is grandson of Mahatama Gandhi and his mother's father was Rajagopalachari, a distinguished statesman and thinker. He pointed out to her how children picked rags by the truck stops and how beggars squatted and bugged by the piles of garbage outside St. Stephen's college. In Delhi, Meena Alexander met Swati Joshi, the daughter of renowned Gujarati poet Umashankar Joshi, Swati and Meena became good friends, reading Pablo Nerula, attending poetry reading, theater festivals etc. Meena met Umashankar Joshi whom she called Bapuji. In *Fault Lines*, she writes about her indebtedness to Umashankar Joshi.

"From Umashankar Joshi, I learnt of the fine pleasures of poetry, of a life bound to the creation literature. As he cut vegetables to make khichdi or stirred the rice and dal, we spoke of poems and the political world. A follower of Gandhi even as a Youngman, he had lived and worked in Sabarmati Ashram, I sensed that Bapuji belonged to the same world as Ilya had, filled with a shining belief in how India could be made anew. It was a world I appreciated deeply, though I did not see how I could be a part of it. There was an amazing quality of light about Umashankar, a true refinement of soul that touched all those around. It was clear that poetry for him was part of the illumination that comes from the shared world. It was inconceivable that it should be something cut apart." ³⁶

In *River and Bridge* there is a long poem titled - *Paper filled with Light*, written in memory of Umashankar Joshi (1911-1989). The poem was composed during September 8-18, 1990. For Umashankar Joshi, poetry was 'paper filled with light': it was an illumination. It was not escape from harsh realities of the world and life. He was aware of violence, terror, inequality, displacement and despair. He had witnessed the massacre of 1947, the killing of partition. He had seen Gandhi praying and fasting. Meena Alexander writes that she too has witnessed traumatic events like massacre of Shikhs in Delhi, rapes and riots in our times. She is unable to reconcile these with lofty ideals of art and poetry. She asks:

"Umashankar I ask you now, what is the sun at midnight?
The spirit's flight? The gold roof of heaven?
What is death doing in the throats of those
from your Bamna, my Tiruvellea, crouched in Jordan's deserts?
What is death scribbling on their cheeks
as they stumble to a water truck long run dry?
I am here to Isamu's garden, by an old warehouse,
by a children's park, by the East River- rusty gasoline tanks - the
packed cars of new immigrants, the barbed wires
of Meerut, Bensonhurst, Baghdad, strung in my brain.

How could I sing of a plum tree, a stone that weeps water?
How could I dream of paper filled with light?"³⁷

The events of 9/11 and aftermath: military retaliation, racial profiling of immigrants and international students made indelible impact on the psyche of the immigrants in the USA. Three Indians were taken off the Boston train in handcuffs. They were quite innocent but they were taken for terrorists. Meena Alexander was worried about her children Adam and Swati Mariam. An acquaintance cautioned Meena Alexander to be careful as her skin was black. She would be taken for an Arab. She wrote a cycle of elegies for dead titled *Aftermath*, *Invisible city* and *Pit fire*. These poems are included in the collection of *Raw Silk* (2004). The poems in this collection mainly describe the poet's emotions upon revisiting India after a long period and finding many wounds and victims following ethnic violence in Ahmadabad, Gujarat in September, 2002. Other poems are set in New York in the aftermath of September 2001 terrorist attacks popularly known as 9/11.

Thus the collection can be seen as an attempt to negotiate a dual trauma both for the poet herself and her subjects. In her piece *Fragile places: The poet's Note book*, Alexander reflects: "What does it mean to belong in a violent world?" Alexander explicitly says that the experiences of violence, war and terrorism were a palimpsest. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word palimpsest means "something used again or altered but still bearing the traces of earlier form". She insists that these poems were flesh, torn out of her body. Though she was born after Independence, the violence of partition was there in the memories of those who raised her. Then she witnessed a long genocidal Civil War in Sudan where she spent her adolescence period. She had heard of teargas, torture, and shooting by the police and army. In India, she saw Emergency and later the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and riots and massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984. And then the terrorist attack on Twin Towers in New York and Hindu Muslim riots in Ahmedabad.

Aftermath is the first of the three poems composed after 9/11 under the title *Late, There was an Island*. The poem describes New York skyline and Hudson river after 9/11 in highly poetic images:

"There is an uncommon light in the sky
pale petals are scored into stone
I want to write of the linden tree
that stoops at the edge of the river.
But its leaves are filled with insects
with wings the color of dry blood.
At the far side of the river Hudson
By the southern tip of our island
A mountain soars, a torrent of sentences
syllables of flame stitch the rubble
An eye, a lip, a cut hand blooms
sweet and bitter smoke stains the sky." ³⁸

The second poem *Invisible City* begins with the last line of the first poem. The city becomes invisible full of 'bruised trees' and the sky becomes a 'Silver of mist' or 'bolt of beatitude'. The poet says:

"Tall Towers, twin towers I used to see
A bloody seam of sense drop free
By liberty street, on a knot of rubble
In altered light, I see a bird cry". ³⁹

The Pit Fire, the third poem in this sequence commences with the last line of the second poem.

"In altered light I hear a bird cry
By the pit, for of metal, strait of death.
Bird song yet, Liturgies' de Cristal
Flesh in fiery pieces, mute sediments of love.
Shall a soul visit her mutilated parts?
Howch shall a body be home?" ⁴⁰

After 9/11, South Asians were targeted. There was a pall of suspicions all brown people who looked like Arabs. Meena Alexander had to attend a meeting of the Asian/ Americans Research Institute in October. Usually, she wore Sari while attending such a meeting but she was warned by friends and students that it was not safe to put on a Sari. So she put a Sari in a plastic bag and slipped out of her slacks and put on her Sari for the meeting. When she looked into the mirror in the fourth floor ladies' room, she heard Kabir, the medieval saint-poet singing to her. She felt that he was giving her the courage to struggle to live. She wrote a poem titled *Kabir sings in a City of Burning Towers*

"What a shame
they scared you so
you plucked your Sari off
crushed into a ball,

then spread it
on the toilet floor
sparks from the tower
fled through the wave of Silk

With your black hair
and sun dark skin
you're just a child of earth.
Kabir the weaver sings:

*O men and dogs
in times of grief
our rolling earth
grows small.* ⁴¹

The Color of Home is a poem about the death of Amadou Diallo, an innocent African immigrant, who was brutally shot to death by the police as

he was standing in his own doorway. Amadou's father was a trader in gemstone and Amadou studied English travelling all the way from Guinea on the West coast of Africa to Manhattan where he met his death. *Fire Fly* portrays a victim of violence whose brother is 'a field of hurt wheat', his father 'a singing ruin' and mother 'crying with a mud in her mouth'.

"Something is scrawled on doors
I cannot see,
A firefly threads my eye.
Who am I?" ⁴²

Green Parasol, as addressed by the poet to her daughter Swati Mariam. The poet describes her birth and her growing-up in to an independent, intelligent young girl. She says that all that she can gift her:

"It's all I have
this moist quilt work
of rooms an balconies,
continents torn, tampered with, blood thirsty." ⁴³

The poet wants her to 'soar over the Bronx River/set fire to old straw/light up the broken avenues of desire.

"Then be a girl like any other,
in soft mist, in flowering sunlight,
at the rim of stone gates,
raise a green parasol
under a green tree." ⁴⁴

The title poem *Raw Silk* sings of countries, home and abroad, the visions of raw silk from Varansi, bonfire of foreign goods ordained by Mahatma Gandhi, Verlaine and Rimbaud, of 'red dates clustered on the bough of immortality', smoke rising from island in the Nile and Silk worms dancing in the firmament. The poet says:

"When I open the drawer
to search for silk

I touch smokes
raw silk turned to smoke in the night's throat" ⁴⁵

Rumors for an Immigrant refers to Gandhi in Central Park with "smoke in his palms, raising his Charkha, fluttering out of his dhoti". The rumors spread that:

"There is no homeland anymore
all nations are abolished, a Youngman cries" ⁴⁶

Petro Glyph is based on Kant's notions of geography. He talked of erasure of borders and cosmopolitanism. It is a long poem in eight parts. The poem talks about the supremacy of the whites, racialism and the poet's journey on the Indian Ocean in childhood.

"Now I live on an island by the mid-Atlantic shore
Home is where when I go, they let me in" ⁴⁷

The poet describes the 9/11 terrorist attacks on twin towers. She describes herself standing by the "burning pit, a burial ground for thousands of people killed in the attack". The poet says:

" I hear names for ancient places: Istalif, Kabul, Kandahar.
I see women shrug off their veils, let sunlight
strike their cheeks. Women casting burkas
into flames no water can check. Children poking bits
of metal in unplowed land, a necklace of sorrow
mothers bear, throats parched with blood". ⁴⁸

Alexander says that out of fire and ruin, a new world might immerge, the world adorned with ornaments of unity. At the end of the poem, she writes:

"Elsewhere in the meadow of hot bones,
grown up girls make implacable plans
than rise on tiptoe with lost larks to sing." ⁴⁹

Triptych in a Time of War refers to Farokh Zad (1933-67), a poet of Tehran who wrote dazzling poems. The poet also refers to Enheduanna (2300 B.C.) the earliest poet known in recorded history. The word 'Triptych' means a picture or carving on three panels hinged together vertically. The poem evokes the terror and tragedy of war.

"O the bomb is fears flower
there is no love in the bomb,
only chaos the sea must swallow.
The flowers of Mesopotamia are tiny, blue edged,
driven under the skin of earth. But where can children hide?
The mouth of the cave is rimmed with red." ⁵⁰

The poets are messengers of love and peace. They are always "in search of language that could tell of love" and justice. Alexander concludes the poem referring to Enhedunna, the poet of love and brotherhood:

"you hear her words unfurl on the screen,
bare sound, filled with longing
syllables of raw silk, this poem." ⁵¹

The poem *Amrita* is inspired by photomontages of Vivan Sundaram's *Retake of Amrita*. The poet here imagines Amrita Shergil speaking after Gujarat atrocities. The poet had seen a child named Yunus in a relief camp in Ahmedabad. Amrita Shergill is the speaker in the poem. Yunus, a Muslim child victim of communal riots in Ahmedabad cites:

"My mane is
Yunus
Yunus can you hear me?

He stands there
half naked
his green shirt
torn, flapping
His belly and ribs

smoking

He skips away
I see his bottom
burst like a raw fruit
with the flames
they tossed him in." ⁵²

Amrita, the artist feels that her paints and brushes are bright as bone. Violence of any kind offends the artist who feels at least for a while that her art has no meaning, no relevance in the world torn by violence, inhumanity and cruelty. *In Naroda Patiya* is another tragic poem describing communal violence in Ahmedabad. The poem is truly heartrending that describes killing of a woman carrying a child in her womb:

"Dark eyes
the color of burnt
almonds, face
slashed, lower
down where her belly
shone
a wet gash
Three armed men
out they plucked
a tiny heart
beating with her own
No cries
were heard
in the city.
Even the sparrows
by the temple gate
swallowed their song" ⁵³

Searching for a Tomb over which they paved a Road is based on the pulling down of the tomb of the 17th century Muslim poet, Wali Gujarati (also known as Wali Deccani) by Hindu extremists. The Hindu fanatics forgot the fact that he loved his city Surat dearly and 'he sang her praises to the moon'. His tomb was razed and they paved a road over it. The Hindu extremists wanted to erase his name from the records of history and poetry. Wali cries out:

*"I am the poet of a city
in ruins
burnt by the sun
bound to the moon
They reeds
by the river
are lashed to swords.
My dust is in the mouth
of the bloodied rose."⁵⁴*

Meena Alexander was in Ahmedabad on September 11 to visit the relief camps for the survivors of ethnic violence. *Letters to Gandhi* contains four poems depicting bloody carnage in Ahmedabad, Babri Masjid demolition and Ramu Gandhi's conversation with the poet. The poem *Slow Dancing* opens with a question to Mahatma Gandhi:

"Dear Mr. Gandhi
Please say something
about the carnage in your home state

How did you feel when they shut
the gates of Sabarmati Ashram
that February night
and wounded clung outside?
What lips, what soles
swarmed across the river?
Is it hot on the other side?

Oh, so many questions, sir,
I cannot help myself
I cannot shut my mouth.

It's hard to hear you,
birds peck at sounds,
maggots gnaw since

even syllables have skin
the kingdom of heaven
is tiny as a mustard seed

and you have crawled there in." ⁵⁵

Gandhi's Bicycle (My muse comes to Me) is the fourth poem in *Letters to Gandhi*. The words in the poem are put into the mouth of Ramu Gandhi, Gandhi's grandson and addressed to the poet. He says to the poet that he has come to her "with a jute bag filled bits of cloth marked with the colors of heaven. He tells her that the earth is cut from underfoot". He refers to Swami Vivekananda who on September 11, 1893 in Chicago addressed the audience as "sisters and brothers of America". He asks her harmony of us would dare to say' that now? Ramu Gandhi, a true heir of Gandhiji tells her that they should continue to spread the message of love, harmony, peace and humanity even in the teeth of war. He says:

"But we need to say that you and I
even in the teeth of war. Come closer now.
Do you hear the still sad music
of children killed in Godhra and Naroda Patiya?
Come closer to this table, cut
from a tamarind tree in my grand father's garden.
You can write your poems here
so they gather the sour sweet light of eternity." ⁵⁶

Fragile Places is a key poem in the collection which has partly set in Gujarat where Mahatma Gandhi lived and partly in Kerala where the great Vedantic philosopher was born in 8th century A.D. He declared that only Brahman (the Ultimate Reality) is true while the phenomenal world is Maya, an illusion, the zone of the unreal. The poem begins with Sankaracharya's quote: "The world is a forest on Fire." It is the central theme of the poem with the images of fire of violence in the world. Meena Alexander quotes Tagore's words: "*I lay with you at the water's edge/ a red rose blossomed in my breast*" that suggest love amidst violence and war. Juxtaposing Sankaracharya, Gandhi and Tagore is suggestive of the ideals of unity, peace and liberal, secular view of religion. In modern times, "*Identities are pulled apart/ on the tongs of war.*" The poet recalls her matriarchal lineage and her birth place Kaladi where the great Sankaracharya was born. Another important figure in the poem is of a woman who responds to the killing of an innocent child in bombing by turning to write instead of washing rice in the kitchen. The woman is the poet herself who has a faith in the power of creativity and poetry:

"Who dares to burn
with the stamp of love?
Words glimmer
then the slow
march to sentences.
Sankara speaks to me." ⁵⁷

The poem displays diasporic sensibility in *Fragile Places* by calling the places 'fragile'. The poet is rooted in India, in Kerala her home. She lives in the USA but returns to India to mourn its state. She says:

"I have come to ground
in my own country
by the Pemba's edge"
in a field of golden rice
where shades gather." ⁵⁸

She visits her grandmother's house her inheritance and yet she feels like an interloper. She is "*unable to reconcile those that are scattered/ with those bound in fragile places*". Thus migrants are destined to be scattered and yet bound and this creates an identity split. Gender, religious and national differences are the dominating forces that create violence and war. Men have failed to provide peace. On the contrary, they have perpetrators of violence and war. Women have acted as the guardians of lineage transcending race, caste, religion and beliefs. Women poets right from Sappho refused to be silenced and they voice the thorny realities of their own lives and the lives of the people all around them. Despite the onslaught of soul-crushing patriarchy, colonialism, race and religion, women poets have expressed the anguish of the world paving the way for love, peace and harmony in the world.

Meena Alexander in an interview with Ruth Maxey for *Kenyon Review* on February 25 and 28, 2005 said about the task of poetry:

"Camus says in *the Myth of Sisyphus* that there's only one philosophical question: whether to commit suicide. And he says, "the point is to live." He says that we must imagine Sisyphus happy as he pushes the stone up. Seen in that way, that act of writing is intrinsic to the act of living.⁵⁹

For Meena Alexander, poetry is the music of survival and place is the instrument on which that music is played. She did not have a one single place to live, a place called home or the language she could call her own language. She felt stranded in the multiplicity that marked her writing and her life. The first border that a woman poet has to cross is that of her body. This border of flesh and bone becomes a boon into existence. Memory has played a very important role in her creation of poetry. She knows about the oral power of poetry and scriptlessness. The title poem *Illiterate Heart* is

about a woman who falls between language and has no script. Alexander says that "for her writing a poem is like rinsing the language".⁶⁰

It can be summed up the words of Meena Alexander that tells how migrant memory shaped and gave birth to her poems:

"Home for me is bound up with migrant's memory and the way that poetry as it draws the shining threads of the imaginary through the crannies of everyday life, permits a dwelling at the edge of the world."⁶¹

Sujata Bhatt, like Meena Alexander, is a remarkable diasporic woman poet. She was born in Ahmedabad, India in 1956. She graduated from writers' workshop, University of Iowa. At present she lives in Germany with her husband and a daughter. She has worked in the United States of America and in Canada. She was a visiting writer at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Her poetical works includes:

Brunizem (1988)

The Monkey Shadows (1991)

The Stinking Rose (1995)

Point No Point (1997)

Augatora (2000)

A Colour for Solitude (2002)

Her poems have been widely anthologized and also have been translated into more than a dozen languages. She has received a Cholmondeley Award in 1991 and the Italian Tratti Poetry Prize in 2000. Sujata Bhatt has lived in India, the US, Canada and Europe. She has also widely travelled across different cultures. She is a highly perceptive artist and art lover. Her collection of poems *A Colour for Solitude* shows her deep sensitivity and understanding of paintings. In this collection, she deals with Paul Modersohn Becker (1876-1907), a young, energetic woman who went her own way against all odds and carved her niche as a painter. Modersohn

Becker belonged to an artists' colony in Worpswede, near Bremen. She died at a young age after giving a birth to a daughter. She left behind her a remarkable body of work which has made her one of the greatest modern painters of her time. Sujata Bhatt was fascinated by her self-portraits and in her poems in *A Colour for Solitude*, she imagines the painter's inner and outer worlds. The poems also explore her friendship with Rilke and his wife, the sculptor Clara Westhoff. Sujata Bhatt herself lived in Bremen and visited Worpswede frequently. She explores in these poems not only the painter's inner and outer worlds but also the weather, the landscape, the language and music of Northern Germany. Her perspective, however, remains that of an outsider, an alien visitor.

Sujata Bhatt's poetry shows the signs of her understanding of time, history and cultures. It exhibits the impact of these forces on the poetry self and identity. In her first three volumes of poetry, we find a kind of Tensional quality resulting from displacement and uprooting from one's own home, country, culture, language and environment. Sujata Bhatt experiences the pang of displacement but does not exhibit it the way other diasporic poets do. She carries with her the seeds of home wherever she goes. A sense of continuity of relationship with home remains uninterrupted and unbroken. It pervades through her poetry and she expresses her sense of home in the following way:

“I am the one
who always goes
away with my home
which can only stay inside
in my blood my home which does not fit
with any geography.”⁶²

For her, home is not a mere geographical entity; it is the part and parcel of her identity, her inner psyche. Even when she is away from home,

she is with home all the time. She does not let it part from her - she says in the same poem :

“But I never left home
I carried it away
with me-here in my darkness
in myself.”⁶³

Home remains central her consciousness in all circumstances. It is true that Sujata Bhatt's concerns are global but she returns to the local or native experiences now and then relating herself to them intimately. When she writes about Hindu-Sikh riots in Delhi, she remembers how she used to lay with Sikh boy in her childhood. Whenever she paints poverty, she evokes the picture of poverty and squalor she had witnessed in Ahmedabad, her home town.

For Sujata Bhatt, home and nation are not just places but amalgam of memories of individuals, legends, relationships, legends, anecdotes, family rituals and history of one's own country. However, she knows that for her, history is a broken narrative, fragmented by post-colonial consciousness. The poem titled *History is a Broken Narrative* depicts the agony of displacement. Sujata Bhatt says:

“History is a broken narrative.
Pilka story and see where
It will lead you.
You take your language where you get it
or do you.
Get your language where you take it ?
I got my in New Orleans.
In New Orleans, when I was five.
A whole new alphabet to go with the new world.”⁶⁴

Then her mother tongue her through the old alphabets and,

“I felt as if the different scripts be longed
together; I felt them raw, clotting together
in my mind,
Raw, itchy - the way skin begins to heal.”⁶⁵

At the end, she frames an equation between history's broken narrative and the narrative of the diasporic self. A diasporic self makes a language when he/she changes it. Bhatt says:

“History is a broken narrative
Where you make your language
When you change it.”⁶⁶

In her poems is *Brunizem* and *Monkey Shadows*, she evokes images of home and the country through birds, animals and insects like peacock, lizard, crocodile, monkeys etc. They are not merely physical entities but the part of her psyche. She also revokes the past through the personalities like Swami Anand, Nanabhai Bhatt, Devibahen Pathak and her grandmother. She also refers to ancient mythological figures like Lord Hanuman, Goddess Kalika, Nachiketa and so on. As a diasporic poet, she connects herself with her home and nation through these figures. The diasporic writer's sense of identity is ascertained and strengthened through the images of past and history of his/her country. Most of the diasporic writers draw images from their home and nation amalgamating memory and nostalgia. The sense of exile is often very strong in some diasporic poets while Sujata Bhatt keeps it in low key referring to her permanent sense of home within her. In her poems like *A memory from Marathi*, *Honeymoon*, *My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari*. She expresses her preoccupation with her childhood and past very strongly. In the poem *My mother's Way Wearing a Sari*, she uses language as a metaphor for diasporic reality. Like the diasporic poet's identity, her language is constantly in flux. She expresses this idea of changing identity in *Augatora* :

“Constantly changing its colours

as if trying to win me over
with its simmering starlets and blacks
then always slipping out of my grasp - and yet
refusing to go away - “⁶⁷

Sujata Bhatt's multicultural perspectives on language, literature, art and culture arise from her own multicultural experiences. Born in India in Gujarat, her mother tongue Gujarati, she has studied in England and the USA, taught in Canada, travelled widely, delved in various arts such as painting, sculpture, literature and so on and now lives in Germany and works there. Her poetry is deeply meditative and philosophical. Her quest is for difficult truths of experiences. Her poetry deals with Indian Landscape and mores towards Europe and America but India remains a necessary obsession. Her preoccupation with cultural identity runs throughout her poetry about places, memories, various art forms, politics and science. As a poet and translator of Gujarati poetry into English, her major concern has been language or languages. She asks in *Augatora* (2000).

“What happened when the Gujarati
and the Marathi and the Hindi
I spoke
made room for the English words.”⁶⁸

Such rhetorical questions recur in her works and they express the poet's genuine quest for fluid identity. Sujata's poetical world is full of colours, sounds and fragrance.

Her first collection *Brunizem* (1988) has almost half of the poems set in India where she recalls her family, childhood memories and sights sounds and smells of village life. Here she recalls “how long and road-dust and wet canna lilies / the smell of monkey breath and freshly washed clothes”. She returns to her city Ahmedabad after ten years. She experiences mixed feelings of nostalgia and confusion. They draw upon Indian myths, deities

and especially of animals: "Here, the gods roam freely / disguised as snakes or monkeys." In Indian mythology, animals play a very important role. They are often the gods themselves or the vehicles of gods. They possess divine powers.

Sujata Bhatt compares the dreams of a young widow with buffaloes 'lazily swishing their tails, dozing.' In a poem *Something for Plato*, a wreck a rhinoceros symbolizes 'philosophical conundrums of soul and body'. Some of her poems are highly erotic. In *Kamasutra Retold* invokes Yeasts's famous Swan to dramatize a 17 year old girl's first act of love. In another poem titled *Sherdi* (sugarcane), love-act is described

"they why I learned
to eat sugar cane...
suck hard with my teeth, pressdown
and the juice spills out."

Sujata Bhatt's metaphors often give erotic plays to language though her preoccupation with language is also political. In her poem she *A Different History*, she says:

"Great Pan is not dead;
he simply migrated
to India.
Here, the gods roam freely
disguised as snakes and monkeys;
every tree is sacred -
and it is a sin
to be rude to a book.
It is a sin to shove a book aside
with your foot;
a sin to slam books down
hard on a table,
a sin to toss one carelessly

across a room.
You must learn how to turn the pages gently
without disturbing Sarasvati,
without offending the tree
from whose woods the paper was made.”⁶⁹

Sujata Bhatt refers to Indian way of looking at animals, birds and other elements of nature. She refers to colonial nature of language when she says:

“Which language has not been the oppressor's
tongue ?
which language
truly meant to murder someone ?
And how does it happen
that after the torture,
after the soul has been cropped
with the long scythe swooping out
of the conqueror's face
the unborn grandchildren
grow to love that strange language ?”⁷⁰

The oppressor's tongue becomes the language of the oppressed. History is a strange phenomenon where quite often the language of the colonizer becomes the weapon for freedom from colonialism for the colonized as has been the case with English. English exercised a tremendous influence in intellectual life of India. Bengal was the first province where English was introduced first and its impact was almost revolutionary. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the first social reformer, patriotic pioneer undertook the comparative study of religions. He was a pioneer of Bengali prose which later influenced other vernaculars of India also. Bengal produced great patriots, social reformers, literary writers and thinkers under the influence of English. This shows that the tongue of the colonizers act as a catalyst for freedom and renaissance of an oppressed country.

Her poem *Search for My Tongue* arises from listening to a tape recording sent by her mother from India to her in Maryland, USA. It has a crescendo like progress made possible by extensive use of Gujarati her mother tongue, with words transcribed in to English within the first part and the third part are in English while the second part in Gujarati with English transcript in brackets. The poet asks:

“I ask you, what would you do
if you had two tongues in your mouth,
and lost the first one, the mother tongue
and could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.”⁷¹

The poet says that one cannot use both the languages together and if one has to use a foreign language all the time, one's mother tongue would rot and die in one's mouth. She says that she felt like spitting out her mother tongue completely. But at night, her mother tongue returns to her in her dream. It blossoms and blooms like a flower on her tongue and ripens like a fruit in her mouth. Then,

“it grows back, a stump of a shoot
grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins,
it ties the other tongue in knots,
the bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,
it pushes the other tongue aside.
Everytime I think I've forgotten,
I think I've lost the mother tongue
it blossoms out of my mother.”⁷²

The poem expresses the poet's fear that she was losing her identity as a Gujarati speaking Indian. It comes from a time when she was studying in America. She feared that she was being Americanized and she was forgetting her mother tongue Gujarati. As she had to use English all the time, she felt that her mother tongue would not and die in her mouth. Then,

however, as she dreams, her mother tongue reasserts itself in her first language. In the beginning, she expresses her distress that she is losing her mother tongue in USA where she had to speak in Americanized English. She fears that the two languages were at war and the foreign language seemed to be winning. But at the end, she feels that her mother tongue reasserts itself at the centre of her life and she is proud of it. The allusion to her dreams has two meanings: one that she speaks in Gujarati in her dreams and also that it is dream and longing to speak it always. Thus the poet is proud and happy at regaining her identity which she was afraid she had lost. The poem is a fine example of the expression of diasporic sense of a loss of language and cultural identity. However, Sujata Bhatt reconciles English and Gujarati finally asserting that one can never forget one's mother tongue as it would blossom out of one's mouth pushing other language aside. The initial feeling of anguish at the loss of mother tongue is finally replaced by the confident reassertion of the mother tongue strengthening the identity of the poet as Gujarati, Indian.

The Dream is a poem about childhood memory of a dream on a windy morning. The poet was about ten or eleven years old. She had been ill for several days and she slept till late dreaming of a snake green at first, then changing into blue and orange. It was trying to win her over with its shimmering starlets and blacks. It slipped out of her grasp and yet did not leave her. Her father watched her from the door-way said:

“Don't resist
You must accept it
Then is no point
in fighting with the snake.”⁷³

Sujata evokes sensuous imagery that symbolize longing and nostalgia. There's always a lost for life in her poems.

Angatora is the title poem about the loss of the word when languages collided bitterly, bloodily. Windoge or vindauga means wind eye, the hole, the opening out into the wind. The wind blows into the house through it. Augatora means eye-gate, the hole for the eye to measure the sun, the gate opening to the sun and light. The poet says:

“Keep an eye on the house
Keep an eye on the child.
Don't let the child fall out of the window.
Don't throw your house out of the window.”⁷⁴

A *Memory from Marathi* recalls the poet's childhood memory of sound of water, the memory that would not go away from the poet's mind. The poet was three year old girl and she was thirsty in the middle of the night. Her mother was sleeping with her new born son. The poet's father went to fetch water for her in the kitchen but it took a long time and she saw that there was a snake between her and her father. The poet's father killed it with a stick and poured kerosene over it.

“It bled and bled-I could never forget
the redness streaming out
of the broken skin.”⁷⁵

Many years later, he told her that it won lucky that he killed it. The poem evokes violent image of killing a snake probably suggesting unwelcome memory or disgusting emotion. There is yet another poem referring to snakes titled *The Snake Cather Speaks*. The poem says that the best way to catch a northern water snake is to corner it in a lake and let it bite on one's arm. It will hold on tight even as one raises one's arm out of water. It hurts as six rows of teeth cut into one's flesh but it is a non poisonous snake, shy and elusive, aggressive only when it is conformed. The speaker in the poem shows the snake to the students and finally let it

loose in the woods. Memories like snakes cling to one's mind hurting and yet harmless. Once one let stream loose, they bolt in a flash out of one's hands.

History is Broken Narrative contains poem referring to partition, Pope, Tito and the WHO, earthquake, New Orleans, killing of a girl child, Shirodkar Suture, Jerusalem, Red Army and other events and personages with political or historical context. *Partition* is a poem describing the horrible experience of partition of India in 1947 by the poet's mother who was nineteen years old then. She could hear the cries the people stranded in Ahmedabad railway station. Her father's sister went to the railway station with food and water everyday but she stood in the garden listening to strange horrible sounds. She had no courage of go with her aunt. The poet's mother tells the poet that she wished she had gone with her aunt to feed the people stranded at the railway station. She, at the age of seventy and India with fifty years of independence, feels guilty for her lack of courage. She says that India was older than that and it was always there. And at the end, she asks the poet:

“How could they
have let a man.
Who knew nothing
about geography
divide a country ? ⁷⁶

Sujata Bhatt in one of her short poems *Diabetes Mellitus* says that if Gandhiji had acute diabetes, he would not have his fasts unto death and like the poet's mother's mother, he would have gone into a coma. Sujata often used medical and scientific terminology in her poems. This is indicative of her knowledge of various subjects like science, medicine, geography and so on. The poem *The Pope, Tito had the Who* refers to the trio who were mentioned over and over on All India Radio in those days. Children became quiet as they listened to their names. The boy decided to be the Pope, the girl wanted to be a doctor but Tito remained a mystery for the children. This

is a poem in a lighter vein about the days when children were highly influenced by radio news.

Voice of the Unwanted Girl is a moving poem about a girl who has been done away with before birth. The dead girl addresses her mother saying that when the doctor told her that she was a girl child, the doctors gave an injection to kill her. She says:

“Before I died I heard
the traffic rushing outside the on soon
Slvsh, the wind sulking through
your beloved Mumbai.”

The girl's mouth did not search for anything and her head was cut apart like a sliced pomegranate. The girl's mother put on her grass green sari and orange stems of Parijatak blossoms adorned her hair. Afterwards, all were happy and smiling. The last part of the poem is profoundly appealing.

“But now I ask you
To look for me, mother,
look for me because
I won't come to you in your dreams.
Look for me, mother, look
because I won't become a flower
I won't turn into a butterfly.
And I am not a part of anyone's song.
Look, mother
look for the place where you have sent me
Look for the unspeakable,
for the place that can never be described.
Look for me, mother, because
this is not 'God's Will'
Look for me, mother
Because I smell of formaldehyde-

I smell of formaldehyde.
and still I wish you would look
for me, mother.”⁷⁷

Kalika deals with the theme of loss because of the protagonist's mother's death and the continuity of the matrilineage through mother's nurturance.

The title poem *History is a Broken Narrative* is an intelligent discourse on language and history. Sujata Bhatt in this long poem in three parts present broken narratives in different slots of time 1996, 1953, 1963 and 1968. She says:

“History is a broken narrative.
There is more than one way
to cut out a voice
more than one way to make a tongue bleed.
Where is the myth?
And where is the emblem?
You make your language when you change it.”⁷⁸

The poet further says:

“It will give you time
time to gather up the fallen pieces
of your language - one by one
with your mouth, with your mouth - you need time
to pick up the scattered pieces of your language
and the way to the neighbor's house is endless
with your mouth like a bird.”⁷⁹

The poet says that she has a clear memory of her life before English and her life after English. She adopted English quietly and easily without even noticing. She asks:

“What happened when the Gujarati
and Marathi and Hindi

I spoke
made rooms for the English words.”⁸⁰

Sujata Bhatt is diasporic poet stands for assimilation and acceptance. Human history, she thinks, is a broken narrative with the phase of fragmentation, assimilation and renewal. Her approach to her diasporic entity is marked by understanding, assimilation, and reconciliation. In *Jerusalem*, she states a universal truth:

"It is so hard to describe the truth".

Her poem 'Language' is addressed to Johannes Bobrowski, a German poet. She reads his poems translated into English but she finds herself remembering her direct way to the poet's German sounds.

"In the end, the birch tree
did n't break and the ice melted
and I could walk beside the river
with your words
an mediated, un-translated in my mouth."⁸¹

Sujata Bhatt returns to her favorite subject of language again and again. In *Jane to Tarzan*, Jane writes to Tarzan:

"Already you have changed
my language, my sleep
At first
I thought I should teach you
English - return to you
what you have lost
But you have changed the sounds
I listen for
the sounds I want to keep
near me."

The poem has erotic, sensuous description. Jane tells Tarzan that he has changed her sleep and also the darkness within her dreams. She says:

“Hunter, ravisher, you are more
that that - with your raw speech
you have tracked me down
with your raw speech you have changed
the way I look at trees
the way I hold a stone
the fruits I eat.

.....
Homeland is always green,
Homeland is nice word
to exercise your jaw.

.....
Still we circle each other
wary of our needs, wary
of our meanings -
the word I know
cannot help me.

.....
You have changed my smell
and my sweat and yes,
my skin which sleeps with language.

.....
How could you - how could you
change my language, my sleep?

How could you make me want
to change myself so much.”⁸³

Sujata Bhatt says that homeland is a sweet word for one's tongue to speak. It is always green in one's memory but the language, the sounds may change with the environment, and with the place you live in and love.

In *Ars poetica*, there is a fine poem on women titled *Is it a Voice?*

“It is a voice
or is it a women?
or shall I say: there is a voice
that is a women?
She greets you
with her Smokey eyes and her head held high
she stands where the trees are slender.
She is so silent
for someone who is a voice.”⁸⁴

My mother's way of wearing a Sari depicts memories of the poet's mother in the poet's mind. The picture of the poet's mother wearing Sari arises before her mind's eyes. She is quite fast at wrapping her Sari round her body, measuring each plant and aligning them carefully, tacking them into her waistband. The poet feels that she would have wore silk instead of coarse handspun khadi. It is ordinary, plain, sturdy and clean. It smells of sandal wood. The poet reminds her of her reddish yellow sari but she only nods but does not wear it. She has put them away in the wardrobe occasionally stroking them while showing them to her daughter. The poet's mother gets up early in the morning when it is still dark. She has to fill all the clay pitcher and vessels with water. The poet's younger brother is still asleep and mother has to finish all her daily chores before her mother-in-law calls her for the kitchen. The poet is unable to sleep thinking about the duties and toils of a dutiful Indian woman. ‘Sari’ here represents not a mere cloth for wearing but symbolizes, power, blessing, curse, personality and so on. The poet's reminiscences of her mother present her diasporic longing and memory of her mother and home. The poem had graphic description of how the poet's mother wears a Sari:

“And then I watch
my mother balance

the pleated part of her Sari
against her waist-
how she measures
and weights each pleat
against each other -
Finally, aligning them into a flowing fan-”⁸⁵

A Detail from the Chandogya Upanishad refers to the Indian metaphor for the sun as the honey of gods, a golden being with red eyes. His red eyes are compared to a red lotus flower and the redness of a lotus flower is compared to a monkey's red bottom. In Sanskrit, these comparisons are compressed in one line. The poet asks:

“Is it innocence - is it
Objectivity?
Or is it simply the reverence?

Will you pray to the Sun?
to the lotus or to the monkey?” ⁸⁶

Here Sujata Bhatt, points to the Indian way of looking at life and nature. She refers to all inclusiveness of Indian approach to life *Poem for a Reader Who was Born Blind*, shows that the blind people understand colors in their own distinct ways. The poet imagined herself blind and listened to a Mongolian shepherd's song. She could hear horses, the vast blueness, snow, a fox and a prairie dog in her song. She felt:

“And then - the blueness
started to seep into my chest...” ⁸⁷

Multicultural Poem is a manifesto of multicultural writing. The very opening introduces the concept of multicultural poetry:

“How the tongue must change

Its color for every language
little chameleon bruised by your teeth.
Pull it out, pull it out, the silence
the silence between
the cadence and the syntax-”

Further the poet says that multicultural poem is a creature,
“a being
whose spirit breaths
like an or child in the sun
still wet from the rain
one day when the garden tilts slippery, sublime
on a day when
the garden dazzles with bird song.”

The multicultural poem cannot be tamed. It would not be anyone's pet it
is meant to be read at the border; it does not expect to be understood
as it is used to being misunderstood.

“It speaks of refraction
It wants more dialogue
between the retina and the light
It says, get rid of that squint’

It lives the chapter in history
they can't teach you in school
It likes no wear a mask - everyday
a different face –

The multicultural poem is not afraid to
Photograph
lotuses
It is not afraid to live
inside a nightingale

some days it will eat roses
uncooked - straight from the bush
some days it will eat snakes.”

Sujata Bhatt highlights the inclusiveness and assimilative element of the multicultural poem. It makes its own rules: It has not set rules to follow nor does it follow any. It likes the word terracotta and it uses words like telescope and other scientific terms.

“It is not afraid
to sleep with the muse
Nights it will dream
of kingfishers, it will
dream of bicycles
It will find its words
in the time between the shadows
in the sounds between
the crows fighting in the guava trees...”⁸⁸

Meeting the Artist in Durban is a poem about a Black self-taught artist who got wood out of river. He never chopped down trees but sat by the rivers for hours watching for wood. He fished for wood he called 'Koodoo' and then carved it in a shape of a man, woman or animals. He stayed silently in a bush and watched birds. He planted new trees. He learnt to speak English on his own. He complains that his people fight among themselves and often beat their women. Therefore, he carved a woman, a big woman, bent down with age and hard humiliating life.

Ars Poetica is a title poem that expresses Sujata's love for vowels in poetry. She says:

“You asked me who envied most
which writer? which poet?
who would I want to be
if I could choose

to be other than myself?"

Then she replies that it is not necessarily a writer but the poem that she envied. It is not simply the poem but the cadence that moved her. It is not only the cadence but the way certain lines are sung by certain singers that appealed to her. She says that she would like to be Fredrika Brillembaury who played the role of orphans in Berlioz version of Gluck's opera. She says that she would like to be the song that accompanied her as she strode across the stage in her black suit, her body like a huge wounded wing. She envied Fredrika Brillembaury acting as orphans singing all these vowels full of loss and hope, screaming for his beloved wife Eurydice. Sujata Bhatt concludes the poem saying:

"Envy? Oh yes.
Oh yes
I would like to disappear
into these vowels." ⁸⁹

Of *Monkey Shadows* (1991), Bhatt wrote in the poetry book society bulletin that her baby daughter was its muse and most of the poems were written during the first two years of her life. The collection contains poems expressing how parent's protective anxieties in the wider context of issues affecting Europe and America. *The Stare* is one of the beautiful poems set in India, observing small children staring at a monkey child.

"There is that moment
when the young woman child
stares
at the young monkey child
who stares back
Innocence falling
innocence in a space
where the young monkey child
is not in captivity.

There is purity
clarity
there is transprence
in the stare
which lasts a long time...

Eyes of water
eyes of sky
the soul can still fall through
because the monkey
has yet to learn fear
and the human
has yet to learn fear
let alone arrogance.”

The monkey child looks at the human child not in the same way as it would look at its siblings. The human child also looks at the monkey child as a totally different being. And yet, there exists good will and curiosity on their faces. Sujata Bhatt says:

“I would like to slip inside
that stare, to know
what the human child thinks
what the monkey child thinks
at that very moment.”

The human child is at the age when he begins to use words. For him, the word is the thing itself.

“Language is simply
a necessary mark
suddenly connected
to the child's own heart beat.”

However, the young monkey child grows at a different rate. It looks at a tree, a bush or at a human child. What it must be thinking is a mystery. It has no words like the ones in human languages. It does not define things as human do. For the monkey child, the word is not a thing but a thing is a thing without definition.

“What remains burning
is that moment
of staring:
the two newly formed heads
balanced on fragile necks
tilting towards each other.
The monkey face
and the human face
observing each other
with intense gentleness...”⁹¹

Maninagar Days present the poet's childhood memories of Maninagar in Ahmedabad where monkeys jumped from trees into cool shadow spots. There were rhesus monkeys that travel in large groups with their extended families. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins fight among themselves while the grandmother sat far away holding on to the sleepy new born. Before every meal, however, truce took place. Hanuman monkey the langur with thick tufts of silver grey eyebrows remained aloof unbothered. Children and monkeys feel closer to each other though they do not play with each other and monkeys are often a verse to children.

“Still, the children treat the monkeys
as if they were children newly arrived from a foreign
country, unable to speak the language yet”

Without monkeys, trees look barren to the children. They climb up the Gulmohur trees refusing to come down. The children are jealous of monkeys for they too like to eat the Gulmohur flowers. They try to coax the monkeys to throw some flowers down.

“Oh with monkeys like that
the children believe an Hanuman.
In their secret wishes the children reinvent
the perfect monkey. Hanuman
wild and fierce and loyal and gentle.”

Hanuman is in Indian mythological character the son of wind God Maruti and Anjana, a goddess turned into a monkey by a curse. Hanuman is considered the most powerful, most intelligent and the most learned. He is also considered to be the ideal of perfect servant who finds full realization of manhood, faithfulness and obedience. He exemplifies the ideal of egolessness, humility and obedience to Sri Ram.

“Some people have monkeys
in their dreams, monkeys in their nightmares
monkey crossing their shadows
long after they have dropped being children
long after they have left such a garden...”⁹³

The Glassy Green and Maroon presents nostalgic memory of the poet's mother wearing sturdy thick green and maroon glass bangles that accompanied all her daily chores reflecting morning sun, afternoon sun and evening light. Sujata Bhatt says that such sturdy bangles are no more available in Ahmedabad or Delhi. Now everything is fragile and breakable like rusty tin shack, raw spaghetti' and dry twigs of the termite emptied trees.

Ajwali Ba was Sujata's grandmother (her father' mother), Nanabhai Bhatt, a great educationist, freedom fighter, social worker and Gandhian was her grandfather. Sujata here presents a fine portrait of Ajwali Ba and Nanabhai. It was an oft-told story by her father as a sort of preface to some philosophical point. It was repeated so many times that the scene unfolded before her eyes at the mere mention of it. The story was like this: Nanabhai returned home at 1.00 a.m. spending whole day with Harijans, the

oppressed caste among the Hindus. Ajwali Ba blocked his way saying that he could enter only after taking a bath outside. Nanabhai was too tired and pleaded for admission, but she insisted maintaining distance so that he could not pull her with his slightest touch. She did not want to change her rules and stuck to her orthodox Brahmin principle. Nanabhai decided to sleep in the garden. Then there was a pause after a few minutes, Ajwali Ba rushed outside running across the courtyard leading to the mango orchard to join him. The poet says

“We'll never know *what*
made her change her mind
perhaps she doesn't know herself
But I can feel her sweeping gesture
her brisk strong arms
tearing into the air
and crescent eyebrows that I've inherited
and impatience to understand him...”

Sujata Bhatt says that soon Nanabhai was asleep but Ajwali Ba continued to keep awake even without bothering to close her eyes.

“I see her staring at the sky
enjoying a private game
of untangling the stars
and counting them
into their correct constellations.”⁹³

Nanabhai Bhatt, Sujata's grandfather was a thinker, writer and educationist. He participated in freedom struggle under Gandhiji's leadership. He was a founder of Dakshinamurti in Ambla Bhavnagar (Gujarat) and later Lokharti, Sanosara in Gujarat. These educational institutions are modeled on Gandhian values like Nai Talim, Basic Education and cultivation of three H's viz., 'head, heart and hands'. *Nanabhai Bhatt in Prison* reminisces Nanabhai in prison in 1942-43. He was thrown into the

prison for helping Gandhiji for Civil Disobedience. Then Sujata was in college, Baltimore, USA reading literature. She pictured Nanabhai in prison in the middle of the night in the middle of writing. He paused to read from Tennyson, his favorite poet. The poet wondered which lines of Tennyson gave him the most comfort as he sat in a dark cell of a prison at the age of sixty. The poem depicts the poet's admiration and adulation for her grandfather who lived the life of principles in turbulent times.

Sujata Bhatt in her poem *Kankaria Lake* describes the famous Kankaria Lake of Ahmedabad.

“It is more like a skin,
a reptile's skin-
wrinkled and rough as a crocodile's
and green
Bacterial green, decomposed
green- opaque and dull.”

Children imagine that crocodiles devour careless men who sleep to close to the lake and,

“There are hardly any trees
near the lake; no friendly monkeys
who would throw fruits down
to the crocodiles, as they do
in one old story.”⁹⁴

A Different way to Dance and *What Happened to the Elephant* refers to Ganesh myth, Ganesh the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. He is considered a symbol of wisdom and prudence. Ganesh did not always have an elephant's head but acquired one after Shiva through a misunderstanding chopped off his original head. In the poem *A Different Way to Dance*, Sujata Bhatt describes a drive South of Boston on her June night when her mother saw an elephant in a truck. They follow the truck as if they were following

Lord Ganesh himself. Then the poet imagines Parvati, Ganesh's mother dreaming of her son's greenish brown eyes, small nose, straight eyebrows, thick knots of curly hair before Shiva 'interfered'.

“Sometime the elephant head of Ganesh
dreams of the life among elephants it knew
before Shiva interfered.
How comfortable it was to walk
on four legs. To be able to speak with mountains
to guess the mood of the wind..
and there was the jungle,
cool mud, dripping leaves,
the smell of wood-sandal wood and teal.
The smell of trees allowed to grow old
the smell of fresh water touched by deer
the smell of his newly found mate
the smell of their mounting passion...”⁹⁵

Sujata Bhatt peeps in to the elephant head of Ganesh who still cherish the memories of the jungle life among the elephant herd. The poem evokes highly sensuous images that appeal to readers' senses of touch, hearing, smell and soon. She returns to the same myth in 'what happened to the Elephant' where she questions:

“What happened to the elephant
the one whose head Shiva stole
to bring his son Ganesh
back to life?”

She prolongs the story by stretching the child's imagination that continues to probe deeper. Ganesh become Ganesh with head of elephant Shiva chopped off but then what happened to the elephant whose head was chopped off. If the elephant was received with, say, a horse's head,

“Who is the true elephant?
And what shall we do

about the horse's body?

The child wants solution where none should dies. The poet says that one imagines a rotting carcass of a beheaded elephant as she looks at the framed post-card of Lord Ganesh. The elephant invited for Ganesh but the other elephants danced in sadness round the beheaded elephant.

“How they turned and turned
in a circle, with their trunks
facing outwards and the inwards
towards the headless one.
That is dance
a group dance
no one talks about...”⁹⁶

Sujata Bhatt's questioning mode raises deeply curious, intellectual and sensitive issues. Her poetry thus differs from other Diaspora poets where one finds a sense of dislocation and displacement from their homeland while in Sujata Bhatt's poetry, one encounters intellectual inquiry often metaphysical in nature. Sujata Bhatt describes tails of monkeys as glorious questions in her poem *Understanding the Ramayan*.

Deviben Pathak is a poem about Sujata Bhatt's grandmother, her mother's mother. She remembers the year 1938 when her mother was twelve years old. Her mother's mother asked the goldsmith to make a pendent in the shape of Swastika for her. Swastika is a sacred symbol in India symbolizing triangular Parvati and triangular Shiva. Deviben had never heard of Hitler's use of swastika for Nazism. Sujata Bhatt was also fond of Swastika symbols that she drew it them everywhere. However, what shall she say to her German born daughter?

"Oh, didn't I love the Hindu Swastika?
And later one day didn't I start wishing
I could rescue the shape from History?"

But how shall I begin?
what shall I say
oh my German-born daughter,
innocent girl with a Lubecker
Baltic-eyed innocent father.”

The poet feels that there is something wrong about many sacred things. They are not always innocent and holy.

“Something is wrong:
So many old religious fatten
on arrangements, on fresh murders
or do they call that offerings?
Someone's wife, someone' son
should not have been touched...”⁹⁷

The poet mixes history, mythology and politics in a very poignant manner connecting it to memory of her grandmother and her German born daughter Baltic-eyed husband. There is a tendency on her past to intertwine the rhythm of vernacular Indian languages Sneh as Gujarati in her poetry in English. Her multilingual abilities create a very interesting effect. In a poem *White Asparagus*, she enters into the consciousness of pregnant women who erotically relieves her state of sexual fulfillment. She asks: “who understands the logic behind the desire?”

A Story for Pears is a very touching poem about her grant aunt Hiraben. She was divorced and started working as a nurse. She was often seduced by married doctors. Her life was a long, tragic story of sufferings. The poet says:

“I wonder if she ever
spoke to God
I imagined she would have given up
with a Lord who allows torture

And how could she have continued
believing in a God who dwells
in every heart? The Lord
in her mother-in-Law's heart?
The Lord in her husband's heart?"

She felt that her soul had left her. Flowers colors, birdsongs meant
nothing to her. She died a tragic death

"Towards the end
when she was dying
she used to poke her naked chest
with a tired finger
as if to say *here here*
this is where my soul used to be..."⁹⁹

The Echoes in Pune describes how scientists use rhesus monkeys in
search for vaccination and anti-biotic. While the poet's father experimented
with test-tube, her younger brother, a six year old, child feels monkeys with
flowers and berries. After many years, the poet is remained of those
monkeys when her daughter lay hot with fever and tense with anti-biotic.

In *Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge*, she remembers the people -
the fathers and mothers from Vietnam who are willing to give their blood,
hair, livers, kidneys to get their children past the statue of liberty. It presents
immigrant's view of subtle form of violence in America.

"In another section
of the Newspaper I read
about the ever growing problems of refugees
who will take them in?
Especially, the ones from Vietnam,
a favorite subject for photographers,
flimsy boats, someone's thin arm in the way -

who can forget those eyes?
And who can judge those eyes
that vision?..."⁹⁹

Distances expresses Sujata Bhatt's true diasporic and multicultural sentiment which always insists on embracing universalism and inclusiveness. The poem in fact, presents her philosophy of acceptance of the entire world as one, the world beyond borders. Once swimming in the Atlantic Ocean in Conil, she feels that every place is closer to her.

"Africa, America,
You are not far away
I touch you through the waves
simultaneously –

.....
And every place slides
through my fingers with the filthy
just breaking waves, relentless
salty water." ¹⁰⁰

But back out of the ocean again, inland; all is separate, distant. Man made borders come into existence on land in the atlas.

"and this ocean
lies trapped on the page
like a gasping beached whale."

Need to recall the Journey is a graphic description of the birth of a child by the mother. She recalls the experience.

"When she was about to slide out
safely
all by herself - I felt my heart
go half-way out with her.
like seeing a beloved one off

to a harbor, to a ship
destined to go
to a far away place
You've never been to..." 101

The mother says that she was lucky to have felt each step. It was a sharp scalping blackness as if one had swallowed thorns, entire cacti and splinters from a knife

"Is it how it feels
to be almost drowned?
Black black
that old knowledge
from the earth.

.....
And then, I was cold,
cold, as if my bones
had been emptied
of their marrow." 102

At the Flower Market describes the poet and her six month old daughter's visit to a flower market not to buy flowers but to just to look around. The poet saw her six month old daughter's face and she stared at colorful flowers. There are explosive hibiscus and bougainvillea, caged in the plastic pots as they sit like laboratory specimens. She recalls her bougainvillea at her Pune house, tall and huge like elephant and bracts flying in the air like paper kites. There were huge hibiscuses in her Pune house like red trumpets with large golden tongues.

In *What Does One Write When the World Starts to Disappear*, the poet imagines rising up of the earth in the form of a woman at the foot hills of the Himalayas complaining to Shiva that she is unable to bear all those weapons - swords, gun, missiles, satellites and so on. She requests Lord Shiva to do

something. Lord Shiva, the God of destruction with seven hooded cobra paralyzed everything to stillness. The poet asks:

"What would one do
when the words starts to disappear?
where does one go?
what does one take along?
and who will read our books
tomorrow? who will listen
to our music, tune the sitars
and violins?
I mean, what species? ¹⁰³

The poet imagines that a few lizards and snakes may have managed to survive. The lizard's tale would be seen dancing through the eyehole of the mask. The snake forked tongue would investigate the nature of plastic. The poem exhibits the modern concerns about war and environmental hazards. The poem possesses universal appeal as it voices the fears of modern world threatened by violence, terrorism, pollution and plastic. The poet uses the Vedic myth of the Earth as a women complaining to Lord Shiva along with scientific terms very deftly.

In *The Stinking Rose*, Sujata Bhatt explores various mythologies and magical aspects of garlic in twenty five parts. The stinking rose is one of the names of garlic. She evokes the hunting memories of India, Europe and Vancouver Island. There is a dialogue between the new world and the old intensifying towards the end of the volume in a series of experimental poems, using Gujarati and English together.

Fate is a poem addressed to A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993), the poet Sujata Bhatt admired the most. The poet comes to know of A.K. Ramanujan's death while she started rereading his poems unaware that he was in a hospital in Chicago and Sujata was in Bremen, not knowingly why she had that sudden craving for his words she says:

“Forgive me if I call it fate
or some from telepathy
But very soon the phone rang
at an odd hour with the news
of your death.”

Sujata Bhatt's volume of selected poems *Point No Point* (1997), which draws on the first three books would appeal to all those who wish to enter an unusual imaginative world. She shows her wider understanding and empathy across cultures and how she enters the world of the artist, dramatizing the experience of language and its multicultural meanings. Her particular achievement lies in the fact that though she writes in English, often dealing with multicultural settings, and themes, retains Indian cultural richness. Her statement: 'I never left home / I carried it away with me' exhibits her internationalism with deep sensitivity and human perspectives. Sujata Bhatt differs from other diasporic poets as her concerns are wider and all encompassing. Her poetry has instinctive sophistication that confronts the contradictions in the world of silence and mythologies. There are also contradictions in her own comparatively orthodox Indian background and upbringing and her extensive travelling and acquaintance with the modern world. She cherishes nostalgic memories of her childhood in India, recalling them again and again in her poetry at the same time, she adapts to new surroundings in new countries trying to assimilate the best from everywhere. She loves German landscapes as much as she does the Indian landscapes. She enjoys and appreciates modern German paintings, music and literature. She is acquainted with several European and Indian languages that prove her with true multicultural identity. She is a sensitive, romantic and even erotic poet with a scientific attitude, wry, wise and searching questioning stance. Sujata's poetry oscillates between her love, her roots and also a certain kind of dislike and disagreement with her homeland with its superstition, poetry, squalor. *Brunizem* refers to a variety of brown prairies soil found in Asia, Africa and North America. It becomes an apt metaphor for dispersal of the self. Thus diaporic poetry is motivated by the sense of

questioning, analysis and shifting attitude towards the process of immigrant life and history.

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CHAPTER IV

Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam



Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni



Jean Arsanayagam



Moniza Alvi

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

CHAPTER-4

Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni, MonizaAlvi and Jean Arsanayagam

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American writer who emerged on the world literary scene during 1990 and established herself as a prolific and highly perceptive writer. She has written poetry, short stories and novels. Divakaruni was born on July 29, 1956 in Kolkata, India. She received her B.A. in English in 1976 from Calcutta University. Then she moved to the USA to continue her studies and got a Master's degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio and a Ph.D. from the University of California in Renaissance English literature in 1985. She has taught creative writing and English Literature at Diablo Valley College, Foothill College and University for Houston, USA. She has co-founded MAITRI an organization that works with South Asian women dealing with situation of domestic violence. She has also worked with Afghani Women refugees and women from dysfunctional families, as well as in shelters for battered women. She volunteers her time to MAITRI and to Chinamaya Mission, a spiritual and cultural organization.

For twenty years, Divakaruni lived in Bay Area and taught at Foothill College. In 1997, she moved to Texas with her husband and two children where she taught creative writing at the University of Houston.

Moved by the dual forces of pre-immigration and post-immigration conditions, touched and moved by the miseries of women in Patriarchal society and also by the desire to preserve nostalgic memory of homeland, Divakaruni started writing poetry and then turned to short stories and fiction. Her major publication includes three volumes of poetry; *The Reason for Mastanimms (1990)*; *Black Candle*

(1991) and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997); two collections of short stories: *Arranged Marriage* (1995) and *The Unknown Errors of our lives* (2001) and five novels. *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *The Queen of Dreams* (2004) and *The Palace of Illusions* (2008). She has edited two multicultural readers titled *Multitude* (1993) and *We, Too, Sing America* (1998). Critics have praised Divakaruni's powers of storytelling, evocative language and highly poignant characterization. They have also lauded her very appealing retelling of the agonies of immigration and portrayal of diverse lives of the marginalized in American society.

Black Candle chronicles the scorched lives of women. It is presented as collection of poems about women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The poet has dedicated the book to her mother and to the sisters of the South Asia Diaspora. The book is traversed by women in purdah, women whose marriages are arranged against their will, childless women enslaved by their husbands' families, outcast widows, women whose foetuses are aborted, women burnt for dowries, Muslims women whose husbands marry second wives, Hindu women burnt alive as Satis on their husbands' funeral pyres, living goddesses whose lives are sacrificed to the services of the temple and so on. Divakaruni attempts to chronicle and expose the sufferings, injustice and cruelty to women which patriarchal hegemony subject to them.

Black Candle is certainly like plunging backwards into the nightmare. There is a description of seemingly innocent and disparate landscape such as the monsoon fields of Bengal, Ocean beaches of Mausai, a mother's kitchen in the US or haunting train journey that turns the known into the unknown. Through these very realistic descriptions, the readers enter the inner landscape of the South Asian women. The readers are drawn into the anguished heart of the poem via these frequently innocent-looking exterior landscapes, the way a seductively fragrant flower unfolds to reveal a captured insect victim in a poisonous core of the flower. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's voice is unique and

appealing. She brings into her poems a wide variety of experiences, a captivating multicultural perspective and a depth of feeling and perception. Her poetry touches the readers' hearts as it voices the genuine and heart-rending pain and oppression of women, exploited by traditions and evil customs.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's concerns are largely feministic. She is a crusader in the sense that she fights for the cause of women. She admits that while she was in India, she was totally immersed in Indian culture and traditions. She could not see the exploitative nature of Indian and South Asian tradition. She had not thought much about women's problems and the need to remedy them. But once she was in the USA, she could view these problems and evils of patriarchal hegemony of the Indian culture objectively. This is not to say that the American society was free from these vices. She found that double standards prevailed regarding women both in East and the West. *Black Candle* is a book that bears a witness to the agonizing lives of women and also the condition of the Worlds in general. What marks her poetry is her genuine compassion that arouses the same feeling in the hearts of the readers.

Leaving Yuba City explores the images about India and the Indian experiences in America, from the adventures of going to a convent school in India run by the Irish nuns to the history of the earliest Indian immigrants in the USA. Groups of interlinked poems are divided into six sections: peopled by many of the same characters, they explore a variety of themes. Divakaruni is interested in divergent art forms like films, music, painting, photography and soon. These poems inspired by various art forms also deal with the experiences of women and their struggle to find identities for themselves. These poems possess universal appeal that captivates all sensitive readers into deep sympathy and heart-felt concerns for the sufferings and problems of women. *Leaving Yuba City* creates an intense chaotic world of

pleasures and pain. It contains magical poetry marked by strong, passionate, lyrical and sensuous poems. It weaves a varied, rich fabric of women's lives both particular as well individual, communal as well as individual, operating on micro as well as macro level.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a successful short story writer also. *Arranged Marriage* is a collection of eleven short stories focusing on Indian women whose lives are linked both to the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and the power changes brought by immigration to the USA. These stories portray the struggles of women caught between tradition and change. India is shown as something that needs to be shed and rejected while America is shown as the source of new hope despite its complexities. The stance constructs the binaries of East versus West, showing West as superior and East as inferior.

The Unknown Errors of our Lives is a collection that features tales set in India and America illuminating the transformations of personal landscapes, real and imagined brought about by the choices of men and women at every stage of their lives. *Mrs. Dutta writes a Letter* is a story of a widow living in her son's California home who discovers that her old, orthodox world ways cause embarrassment to her daughter-in-law.

The Mistress of Spices, Divakaruni's first novel mingles magic and realism. Tilo is a magical figure who runs a grocery store and uses spices to keep customer overcome difficulties. But when she falls in love with Raven, a Native American, she is confronted with her own desire to be happy and to help others through the magic of spices; she has to decide which part of the heritage she will keep and which part she will choose to abandon. Tilo's dilemma is an allegory of the immigrant who experiences the dual pull of the charm of the past and the call of the present.

In *Sister of My Heart*, two cousins are brought together by destiny to be born on the same night in the same house. Closer to each other, they share joys and pains of each other willingly. Sudha is startling beautiful while Anju is not. Bonded in mysterious way, they are sisters of the heart. They grown into womanhood but their fates remain merged. Sudha is gentle and quiet; Anju is rebellious and questions the old traditions that Anju respects. Yet when Sudha is put to the test, she makes the biggest sacrifice and treads the boldest path. When due to a change in family fortune, the girls are urged into arranged marriages. One travels to America while the other remains in India. When tragedy strikes both of them they discover that despite distance and marriage, they must try to each other once again. Here again, Divakaruni shows America as the land of hope and promise. While India is the land, they must forsake for good. The language of the novel is metaphoric and sensuous.

The Vine of Desire is a continuous of the story of Sudha and Anju from *Sister of My Heart*. Far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood and after years of living separate lives, Anju and Sudha rekindle their love and friendship. Now they face new challenges: a baby born and a baby lost, Anju's husband's treacherous attraction to Sudha's beauty and Sudha's difficulty in finding a new home for herself. Again, the language of the novel is rich with poetic imagery and lyricism.

Queen of Dreams is a story of Rakhi, a young artist and divorced mother in Berkley, California. She struggles to keep her footing with her family and with a world in alarming transition. Her mother possesses a special power of interpreting dreams and guides others through their fates. This gift of vision fascinates Rakhi but also isolates her from her mother. She longs for something that might bring them closer. After her mother's death, she reads her dream journals that open the long closed door to the past.

The Palace of Illusions is highly relevant in War torn world of today. It takes us back to the times of the Mahabharata and the story is narrated by Panchaali, the wife of the five Pandavas. Divakaruni gives us a rare feminist interpretation of the great epic. Panchaali is presented as a fiery female voice in a rare world of warriors, gods and constantly manipulating fate. It is an ambitious work of art recasting the saga of the Mahabharata.

Divakaruni's literary works have been critically well-received in the United States. She has won many awards including a California Arts Council Award (1998), a PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award (1996), a Pushcart Prize (1994), the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize (1994), the Editor's Choice Award from *Cream City Review* (1991) and the South Clara Arts Council Poetry Award (1990). Most of her works have been appreciated for the fusion of lyricism, realism, myth and fantasy. However, critics have also criticized her works for her denigration of the Indian society and glorification of the taboo-free modernized society of the West, of the USA in particular. Divakaruni has defended her portrayals by saying that they are guided by truth, honesty and compassion for characters.

Divakaruni says that as a writer, she always wants to connect with women and women's groups. She is deeply involved in women's issues and conditions. She says that living in the US made her see and analyses the Indian life and culture objectively, and dispassionately. She noticed that many women are still caught in the value system that a man has precedence and power over than and mutely tolerate all injustices. She founded an organization called MAITRI in 1991, the first South Asian service of its kind on the West Coast. It is a help link which women in distress can use discussing their problems with trained volunteers. These volunteers speak many South Asian languages and have the understandings of the cultural context. The organization provides free of cost services including legal and medical help besides

family counseling. The most importantly, it provides a moral support to women creating in them a sense that a woman is not alone and she should not have to put up with the abuse of any kind. Divakaruni as a writer articulates the deepest fear and trauma faced by women in India and elsewhere. She exhibits women characters that emerge stronger and self-reliant. Some of her characters provide role models for women readers and women activists. She says that living in America has beneficial effect on many women writers. She says that her mother also wanted to be a writer but she could not do it because of family responsibilities. She says that it is not enough for women to have a room of their own to write but they must give it a priority. She emphasizes that woman writers should act as a writing community, reaching out to each other and drawing strength from each other.

The Room in Black Candle portrays the 'mouth less face' of the mother Divakaruni depicts a fine picture 'a woman who rises towards' her. She says,

"I am caught
by the lines of her bones, the fine
lighted hairs on her held out arm,
your eyes, mother, in her held out arm,
your eyes, mother, in her mouth less face."¹

Nargis' Toilette is inspired by a Muslim saying that says that 'the uncovered face of a woman in a firebrand, inflaming men's desires and reducing to ashes the honour of her family'. Nargis' face is powdered and her eyes are under lined with kohl. Attar of rose is applied behind her earlobe women put henna on her hands and braid her hair. Divakaruni described the caged life of the women.

"In the women's courtyard,
It is always quiet,
The carved iron gates locked.
The palm shivers by the marble fountain.

The bulbul sings to its crimson double
in the mirrored cage.”²

Nargis will be taken to visit the women of the Amin family. Nargis will sit with her eyes down. She will see for the first time Amin’s second son in the square wedding mirror placed in her lap. If the Allah wills, her marriage with Amin’s second son will be fixed. When she leaves, Nargis head is covered with black burkha that

“Spreads
Over the land, dark wave
Breathing over the women, quenching
Their light
Now all is ready
Like a black candle
Nargis walks to the gate.”³

Bengal Night describes the life on a poor child who goes at night with a lantern to bring her grandfather home.

“The claws of night lizards
Skitter over rocks. Vapors rise
From the pocked phosphorus skin
of the mosquito swamp water insects
Cry into the hearts of elephant ears”⁴

The child sets down the lantern and whirls around and around in the blue breathless air.

“Her skirt
Flares hibiscus red to touch
the whole. In the wheeling
Sky, star-studded bats hand
motionless on great leather wings.”⁵

(Black Candle, 5)

Hibiscus-red and whirling skirt symbolizes the innocent poor girl's desire for freedom and total abandon. However motionless bats with great leather wing symbolize the dull and monotonous life the girl had to live every day.

The Robbers' Cave is also a poem depicting poverty and deprivation of a girl whose mother was always pregnant and whose hand were blue-veined, her home-bleached and whose face was blood less and anaemic. Her step father bent her and other siblings. She dreamt of her true father who had died at the time of her birth. The girl liked to play the game 'Robbers' Cave' with her friends but she was never given her coveted role of the princess as she was only seven. Once she begged and begged until they let her be a princess for a day just once. She lay on the cold cement floor of the cave waiting for the prince who never came but the maid came and called her home for their mother was dying. Divakaruni poignantly depicts the picture of a deprived child whose dream world is marred by harsh realities of life. The bed of the girl's mother was full of blood as she lay beside dying baby. The girl's step father had flung the girl's mother against a stair-wall. Her agonized scream was muffled and no one had heard it. The girl hears her again and again in her dream as the scream echoes in the robber's cave where she lies with hands tied being sucked by the metallic smell of her blood and 'burning breath of her father on her'. The girl waits for the prince, the savior who never comes. Divakaruni takes up the issues of child-abuse, cruelty on women, poverty and inhuman treatment of women in South Asian Countries where traditional patriarchal system is still very dominantly and women suffer subtle forms of injustice and inequality often perpetrated not by men but by women on women.

Gauri Mashima portrays the character of the poet's mother's sister who failed to bear children after marriage and sterility in a woman is a curse in India. She had come from water country to dry land at the

age of fifteen. She who swam and dived underwater had no enough water for her bath. One day, she escaped from her husband's house by hooking her arm into the looped anchor rope of a boat to the land of water again. Gouri Mashi symbolizes a free spirit like river that flows unharnessed.

The Arranged Marriage describes the Indian marriage in which bride's father has to give dowry gold to groom's father. From Western point of view, both arranged marriage and dowry are strange evil customs that treat women as inferior sex. Divakaruni takes her adopted Western stance while viewing many Indian customs. It cannot be denied that certain customs are really inhuman and anti-women but in India, marriage is a family affair rather than individual choice and arrangement. As a diasporic poet, Divakaruni has been convinced that the Western individualism provides freedom and scope for expression of women's personality which are usually denied in Indian tradition-bound society and in other South Asian countries.

The custom of Living Goddess is very much like Devadasi- a girl dedicated in the service of the temple. In Nepal, the worship of the Living Goddess continues even today. The goddesses are discarded at puberty. While Devadasis are sexually exploited and often live as concubines or prostitutes, living goddesses are feared and avoided by men who live their lives as outcasts. In the poem *The Living Goddess Speaks* Divakaruni makes the Living Goddess speak about her life. At the age of five, the temple priest came to visit the girl's grandfather. He examined the girl and found thirty two auspicious signs in her body. Thus, she was taken to the temple to become Kumari, the new Living Goddess. It was a great honour in the eyes of her family. Then she was forcibly taken to the temple where she spent nights on ivory beds and days on the temple throne. People worshipped her. One day, her sister came for her blessings in her bridal costumes. The Living Goddess is supposed not to weep or speak. As she started menstruating, another

living Goddess succeeds her. Then she is shut beyond the walls with iron gates. She yearns for someone's kiss but,-

“Who can kiss shut the eyes that cannot weep?
or lover his weight between the open legs
of a once Living Goddess?”⁵

Mother and Child describes the pangs of the birth of a dead child childless women live accursed life.

“Thoughts of empty days, pointed fingers
There goes the childless one
endless blind nights under her sweaty body.”⁶

Song of the Fisher Wife tells us of the woes of the fisher women folk where it is believed that the virtue of the wife keeps her husband safe at sea. Widows of the fishermen have to live the life of outcast and they are often forced into becoming prostitutes in order to survive. The poem describes the death of a fisherman at sea and the fate of the widow of the dead fisherman.

“They say all heard the crack and yell,
the boat exploding into splintered air,
searched for hours. They strip
my widowed arms, shove off my hair
Thrust me beyond the village walls.
Nights of no-moon will come to me,
Grunting, heaving, grinding
The damp sand into my naked back
men with cloths over their faces.”⁷

My Mother Tells Me a Story shows how the birth of a girl child is looked at by the father of the girl-child who does not even come to see her. *Two Women outside a Circus, Pushkar* is inspired by a photograph by Rahgubir Singh. The poet here portrays the hard life of the women working in circus walking on tight rope or being hurled from a flaming

cannon. At home, they live the life of deprivation caused by poverty and frequent pregnancies and childbirth.

At the Sati Temple Bikaner is also inspired by a photograph of Raghbir Singh. It depicts the most horrible of all evil practices in India. It is the practice of Sati, the burning of Widows on their husbands' funeral pyre. During the 19th century, it was outlawed but still isolated incidents of Sati occur in some parts of India, particularly in Rajasthan. Sati temples extolling the virtue of the burned wives still continue to flourish against law, disgracing the Great Indian Dream of Development and Modernization. These Satis-

“...have no names, no stories
Except what the priest tells each day
To women who have travelled the burning desert
on bare, parched feet.”⁸

The widows are burned on funeral pyres of their husbands, held down with poles by force till their skin bubble away from pale pink under flesh.

“In this place
Of no wards, the women walk and walk
Somewhere in the blind sand,
A peacock's cry, harsh, cut-off
for its mate or for rain.”⁹

I, Manju has been penned after Mira Nair's film 'Salam Bombay'. It depicts slum life of Mumbai where poverty and prostitution go hand in hand. Manju, the speaker tells us about her mother who

“disappears into the room,
each time with a different
man many fingers
squeeze the rails
till rust scars the palms

The door shuts. The curtains
shiver with silhouettes.”¹⁰

Sudha's Story is a poignant tale of a young girl who wanted to pursue her love for classical dance. The Allaripa, Tillana and Nataraja are classical Indian dances. The Allaripa usually occurs at the beginning of the performance, the Nataraja at the end. Sudha was married to an officer at Delhi. Her parents sold the village home for a grand wedding. Everyone thought that Sudha was a lucky girl to find such a successful, well placed husband. However, he was jealous, mean-minded and possessive. He asked her to dance in the bedroom telling her that,

“From now on, you dance
only for me.”

They went to Agra on honeymoon but the next day, he took her home saying that she looked at the guide and smiled at him. He did not want her to flirt with anyone. He locked her inside the house when he went to work. He brought gifts a new sari, perfume etc and made her wear the while making love. When she bore a child, he said it was not his child as no one fathered girl children in his family. He tried to kill her by giving her poison with tonic but she survived. At last, she decided to perform the Nataraja dance, “the dance for the world's burning end.” She bolted her husband's bedroom door from outside and poured kerosene and set the house on fire. She says,

*“My right foot balances
On a wheel of Fire
I swing the left across
The trembling air
My palm holds up the sky,
which will fall
when I turn my wrist”*¹¹

The Garba is a poem about Gujarati Navaratri festival dance quite popular in the USA also among non-resident Indians. The Girls shed their jeans for long red skirts, pull back premed hair into plaits, strip off nail polish and mascara and press henna on to their hands and kohl under their eyes. The girls say:

“Our hips
move like water to the drums
And,
The drums pound faster
in our belly, our feet glide
on smooth wood. Our arms
are darts of light. Hair, silver braided,
lashes the air like lightning
The whirling is a red wind
around our thighs. Dance sweat
burns sweet in our lips.”¹²

The description of dancing girls in Florida, USA is highly graphic and even sensuous. Divakaruni’s tone in the poem is feminist as well as nostalgic of Indian Navaratri festival and Indian landscape. The girls...

“.....spin and spin
back to the villages of mothers’ mothers
we leave behind
the men, a white blur
like moonlight on empty bajra fields
seen from the speeding train.”¹³

The Market of Chili Paste is inspired by Ketan Mehta’s film ‘Mirch Masala’. It depicts the bold, rebellious, independent temperament of chili paste makers. The speakers in the poem are women who work in a chili factory on the hill. All day, their big wood

pestles rise and fall like their heart beats. They voice their burning, flaming temperament in the following words:

“Our red hands
burn like lanterns
through our solitary nights
And,
All who taste our chilies
must dream of us,
women eyes like rubies
hair like meteor showers.”
(Black Candle, 51)

Making Samosas is a nostalgic poem about how the poet's mother used to make delicious samosas and how in spite of the doctor's advice, the poet's father could not resist his desire to eat them. He had a stroke and he was advised not to take oily food. When he was reminded of the doctor's advice, he flew into the rage and threw the chutney bowl across the room when the poet tried to call him from abroad, he hung up each time. She says that when she stirs tamarind into the chutney, she can visualize her father's left leg dragging a little 1500 miles away.

Burning Bride is a poem dedicated to the victims of dowry deaths in India. Amidst the sacred chants of the Brahmins and the music of shehnai, the girl is married to a man with fire as the witness. After wedding, her in-laws weigh her jewellery and find it short of her father's promise. The girl wrote to her father but his last cow was sold off and two daughters were still to marry off. She lived like a servant breaking coals for the kitchen in a windowless room. She wrote to her father that she would like to return to him but if she left her husband's home, the family name would be tarnished and her sisters would remain unwed. Then one day, her in-laws poured kerosene over her body and burned her to death.

“Did they hold her down, struggling?
Oozing the dark oily stain?
Did they silence her cries?
Rough hand clamping across hips,
So the only sounds
Were the sharp rasps of a match?
And quick blue hiss of fire
Leaping in a night turned sudden red?”¹⁴

Rest Room is a prose poem describing the journey of an immigrant woman to the US to be with her husband after eight years. After twelve hours journey by plane, her bladder bursting and she pushes out of customs with numb legs. Women in India do not speak of body-things and so she did not ask a heavy red-faced moon next to her to move so that she could go to toilet. She knew that her husband also lived a hard life in the US eating only one meal a day and washing his clothes at night. At the air-port, she is informed that her husband is in the hospital. Then she sees a sign WOMEN for women's restroom. She goes inside to relieve herself. The description of the relief she experiences has been described vividly. Thus prose-poem shows the hardships and sufferings of the immigrants abroad.

Divakaruni works for battered South Asian women in the USA, *The Women Addresses Her Sleeping Lover* is written for Maya at the women's Shelter at Oakland. Maya's alcoholic lover beats her frequently and though she loves him, she wishes that he would never wake up again. *The Rain Flies* reminisces Indian monsoon when rain flies plunge into fire with brief gossamer blaze. On a rainy night while the rain pours heavily, children huddle in quilts listening to the rush of water outside. The poet left for a foreign country while Champa stayed back learning cooking, stitching and bathing fully clothed in women's pond. Champa's few letters never revealed her agony-filled life but one

day, she went to the bridge on rain-swelled night and killed herself on the railway track.

“The moving after the storm
the maid would sweep out
piles of pale wings, torn and shimmer less
the blind bodies crawling
ant like in desperate circles
searching for the flame”¹⁵

My Mother Combs My Hair presents the poet’s recollection of her mother combing her hair, sitting on the chair cross-legged and she on the floor kneeling. She regretted that her hair was not long and strong like hers. She said that when she was young, her hair reached her knees. At marriage, dowry was waived on account of her long beautiful hair. She commented:

*“How you’ve ruined you hair
this plait like a lizard’s tail
or if you don’t take better care
of it, you’ll never get married.”*¹⁶

Now after her husband’s death, she has grey strands of hair, cracks at the edges of her eyes. The poet says:

“We hold the silence
tight between us
like a live wire
like a strip of gold
torn from a wedding brocade.”¹⁷

My Mother at Maui Shows the poet’s attachment and love for her mother. The orthodox mother avoided the rows of bikini-clad beauties on the beach. She bathed in the ocean fully-clothed the sari billowed around her like a white petalling. The poet says that she had never

seen such an expression of happiness and contentment even before the death of her husband.

“I wrapped
The towel around your shoulders
We walked back silent, your hand
Light as a nesting bird
in the oval of my arm.”¹⁸

The Garland is a touching prose poem of a Muslim woman whose husband allows her to stay out of compassion instead of pronouncing the word ‘talaq’ for here times. She accepts her fate stoically without complaining or crying. She even decorates her husband’s marriage-bed when he brings Jalal Mohammed’s fair, beautiful daughter as his wife. The bride is overjoyed to walk into a forest of blossoms, marigolds, rose’s oleanders and jasmine. She touched light, shining petals only to find that they were torn butterfly wings. ‘Butterfly Wings’ symbolizes torn, broken life a woman.

The House depicts the memory of old house and childhood where opened cupboards spill tears like diamonds. The speaker says:

“At last, I see it in the corner,
tiny, glowing fire-fly bright:
My childhood, just as I lift it
I reach out but there’s a sharp
hiss. Between us, an enormous cobra,
hood upraised, black
as my father’s eyes.”¹⁹

Cobra symbolizes ugly memories of childhood and the cruelty of the speaker’s father. These memories coils like a ribbon of silk in her hair. Time and again, Divakaruni presents the picture of a cure husband and father. Her crusading zeal seems to exaggerate the cruelties of men. Like Taslima Nasreen, she raises her voice against

the entire patriarchal hegemony and evil customs nurtured by it. *The Gift* paints the picture of a wedding of an Indian girl who walks behind a main around the sacred fire taking vows to follow him till death. Indian, good woman is one who brightens her mother's name, one who serves obediently and unquestioningly, one who regards her husband as her god.

Journey describes the journey by train to homeland in India from abroad with the speaker's husband and children. The husband tells the children the stories of his father who was a zamindar. He used to beat women with a whip. He used to beat his wife with a whip that made a permanent mark on her back. The zamindar's house is filled with stuffed heads of tiger, buffalo, antelope and rhino. The poet says that there are only stories of fathers, never of mothers. It was like plunging backward into nightmare. The speaker feels like pulling the emergency chain and running away with the children to the sane world of her home but it was too late,

“Tomorrow we will enter
The places of your childhood
You will stride ahead with your son,
I, veiled and wifely, with your daughter
behind. Journey's end.”²⁰

The New City (I), (II) and (III) are poems in sequence speaking about an immigrant's encounter with a new city and new country. In a new city, in a new country comes across absence, lack of knowledge of the bird calls and forgets names of old trees like mango, banyan, jackfruit one learn the names of new trees, new birds and even new people. When one opens one's hands, the names of friends fall from one's hands. In the countries like the USA, on a new free way, there are no landmarks. One feels as if the tyres of the car slide on river ice. Tree are faceless due to unleafing and time rush by laughing while as shredded letters. In

a new city, one becomes anonymous. The poet says that in an alien country, one becomes a nameless person but this also gives one an unknown sense of freedom.

“On streets where no one knows you (She recalled)
You dance the anonymous dance, not touching ground.”²¹

Leaving Yuba City contains poems on a variety of themes, suffering of women and their struggle to seek their identities. *Nishi* is a prose poem that is hauntingly pathetic. The speaker’s mother lived a life of suffering. Like a caught bird. After her husband’s death, she commits suicide ending the tragic tale of her life. The speaker hears her mother’s voices calling her with its unbearable sweetness and unbreakable threads of spun sugar.

The section *Growing up in Darjeeling* contains five poems recalling the poet’s Scholl days in Darjeeling at a convent school run by the Irish missionaries. The poets depict a gloomy picture of the stern school discipline coupled with moral science lessons. Children waited for winter vacation in December but as they waved good bye, they wept wishing that they could come back. The section: *Rajasthani* contains four poems after the photographs of Raghbir Singh. Two of them *Two Women Outside a Circus*, *Pushkar* and *At the Sati Temple, Bikaner* have been discussed earlier in *Black Candle*.

The Babies: I and II are poems about new born babies left by their mothers in garbage or on hospital steps. Sometimes, they carry notes pinned to their clothes: *Her mother died. Her name is Lalita. Please bring her up as Hindu*. The poet says that they are considered children of sin, whom no one will marry and they too would leave their babies on the steps of the hospital. The speaker is unable to forget them who continue to suck all through her sleep. *Train* is a prose poem about a man who lives near the railways station and goes it between 6 and 7 in the evening. He enjoys watching the hustle and bustle on the

platform when the train comes. Every night, he sleeps with his wife in his airless bedroom smelling of diapers and her hair oil. He is happy and contented as long as his wife turns and puts a damp arm over his. This is a very realistic picture of the Indian poor who often live contented lives never thinking of what they do not have.

The section: *Yuba City Poems* contains five poems narrating the emotional trauma of the first immigrant from Punjab to Yuba City in 1910. Now it is a thriving Indian community in Northern California. Until the 1940's, the Alien Land Laws precluded non-white immigrants from owning land and immigration restrictions prevented their families from joining them. A number of the original settlers could never reunite with their families. *The Founding of Yuba City* describes the first immigrant from Punjab who came to Northern California after a month long journey, toiled hard as labourers, unaware of the Alien Land Laws hoping that

“Tomorrow they would find jobs,
Save, buy the land soon.”²²

They remembered their wives in red skirts who carried rotis, alu and jars of buttermilk for them to their fields. They longed to be reunited with them.

“Not knowing
how the wheels of history
grind over the human heart, they
smiled in their sleep.”²³

Yuba City Wedding is a long prose poem that describes a Sikh who is going to marry a Mexican woman. During 1920s to 1930s, several men married local women from Mexico as they could not go back to Punjab to marry Punjabi women. The poem describes a Sikh sharing a rickety room with five other labourers in Yuba. He decides to marry Manuela, a Mexican woman out of necessity. Manuela is a

Christian who eats pig's flesh, cow's flesh, she is not clean and ant even white skinned. She is not fit to raise her children s good as Sikh but he had no choice. He remembers Punjab, his home, his own people and culture. He knows that it was like groping into the dark, uncertain future which was the destiny of all immigrants in those days.

The Brides come to Yuba City depicts women who first came to Yuba City after the immigration laws were relaxed and they were allowed entry in the USA. They travelled for a month to reunite with their husbands whose faces they have forgotten. These Sikh women express their trauma-ridden life.

“Thirty years
since we saw them. or never,
like Halvinder, married last year at Hoshiarpur
to her husband's photo
which she clutches tight to her
to stop the shaking
he is fifty-two,
she sixteen. Tonight-like us all-
she will open her legs to him.”²⁴

Yuba City School describes a Sikh boy Jagjit's humiliation at school where the teachers and other students make fun of him and inflict insults all the time. He dreams of going back to Punjab, and his grandfather's mango orchard:

“The earth, he knows, is round,
and if he can tunnel all the way through,
he will end up in Punjab,
in his grandfather's mango orchard, his grandfather's songs
lighting on his head, the old words glowing
like summer fireflies.”²⁵

Divakaruni portrays the strong, independent young woman of the modern generation who decides to leave her home in Yuba City for Las Vegas or Los Angeles. *Leaving Yuba City* the title poem of the collection is a prose poem about a Punjabi Sikh girl Sushma who packs her bags and baggage and at night when all are asleep, leaves her home, her parents and old asthmatic grandfather. She wants to leave them because their orthodox ways are suffocating her spirit. She wants to live on her own, independent, matured life with freedom and dignity. She knows that she is bound by ties of language to her joint family. She says:

“May be the words will come to her then,
halting but clear, in the language of her parents,
the language that she carries with her for it is
hers too, no matter where she goes. May be
she’ll be able to say what they’ve never said to
each other all their lives because you don’t say
those things even when they’re true. May be she’ll
say, *I Love You.*”²⁶

In *Woman with Kite*, Divakaruni portrays a woman who cuts through her stereotypical role of wife or mother achieving new found joy and freedom. She takes up the spool of thread from her son and like a young girl lets the kite go up into the sky. She sprints backwards, sure-footed and connected to the air as if she were flying herself. She laughs like a woman should never laugh.

“She laughs like wild water, shaking
Her braids loose, she laughs
Like a fire, the spool of a blur
Between her hands,
The string unraveling all the way
To release it into space, her life,
into its bright, weightless orbit.”²⁷

Indian Movie, New Jersey gives a picture of the Indians watching Indian movie in New Jersey, admiring plump Indian actresses, dance and songs, mispronounced English of the Indian actors and actresses. Their young children are no more interested in Indian culture and Indian cinema. Their sons do not want to run the family stores anymore. Their daughters date secretly. The first generation viewers admire and applaud friendship and sacrifice of the Indian hero. After the film is over, they talk of about their trip to India and share good news. They do not speak of motel raids, cancelled permits, stones thrown through the windows in their stores or houses or their daughters and sons raped by anti-Indian gangs. The immigrants abroad always feeling insecure and dream of retiring to India with a yellow two storied house with wrought-iron gates and their own Ambassador cars. The movie Truths like sacrifice, success, love and luck seem to be more real to the Indian immigrants abroad. The poem deals with the lives of the immigrants in the USA and diaspora in general, who suffer from the sense of insecurity and seek refuge in their native culture, art, religion, festivals and gatherings.

Like *Black Candle, Leaving Yuba City* also contains many woman-centred or even mother-centred narratives focusing on mothers of the first generation. These women suffered the pangs of imprisoning patriarchy but survived them through either submission or cunning strategies paving ways for more freedom and creative life for their daughters. Divakaruni employs poetical metaphors of birthing, pregnancy, nursing and motherhood in her poetry, emphasizing on and exploring the secret alleys of women's bodies. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands out as a bold, feminist diasporic poet whose cries of protest and rebellion ring out bold and clear.

Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1954 and she was taken to England when she was a few months old. She grew up in Hertfordshire and studied at the Universities of York and London. She

worked as an English Teacher in London. *Peacock Luggage*, a book of poems by Moniza Alvi and Peter Daniels was published as a result of the two poets winning together the Poetry Business Prize in 1991. Her first collection *The Country at My Shoulder* (1993) was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot and white bread poetry prizes and was selected for the New Generation Poets promotion. *A Bowl of Warm Air* (1996) was featured in *The Independent* on Sunday's 'Book of the Year'. *Carrying My Wife* (2000) her third collection was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Her latest collection is *Souls* (2002). She has worked on a series of poem-myths inspired by Rudyard Kipling's *Just so Stories*.

Moniza Alvi's father is from Pakistan originally and her mother is English. They had met when Moniza's father was in England for apprenticeship. They went back to Pakistan, but eventually decided to return to England. Moniza says that she never actually learned her father's language and she regrets it to some extent. While growing up in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, she felt that her origins were invisible as there were very few of mixed race to identify with. However, as a child, she was brought up in the Church of England. Her father's religion was Muslim he was not a practicing Muslim. He had a fairly typically English upbringing of 1950's/1960's. Moniza did not visit Pakistan until 1993. Moniza says that she does not consider herself anywhere as entirely home. Even when she visited Pakistan 1993, she did not feel that was home. She had never felt at home in England. She even does not consider herself as a part of the Asian community. As she has written poems about her Asian background, people identify her as a black writer the title that she refuses to accept. She feels that England is culturally mixed now.

In a telephonic interview recorded by B.B.C., London, June 1998, she defines identity as something deeper, something that has to do one's spirit.

I suppose I would define identity. Very broadly in terms of what you do, what you respect and may be something deeper, your spirit. But it's important to know where you come from, which is perhaps what I was lacking as a child. I think it's important to know what has gone into your making, even quite far back, I think it gives you a sense perhaps of richness.²⁸

As a poet, Moniza Alvi is attracted by the visual and it is reflected in her poetry-some of her poems are fairly autobiographical. *The Country at My Shoulder* contains poems of childhood memories in England. These poems describe childhood play, fights and adventures. In the very first poem, she says:

"I was raised in a glove compartment.
The gloves held out limp fingers-

In the dark I touched them
I bumped against the First Aid tin,

and rolled on notepads and maps.
I never saw my mother's face-

Sometimes
Her gloved hand would reach for me

I existed in the quiet. I listened
for the sound of the engine."²⁹

Pilgrimage, *Neighbourhood* and *The Garden* are the poems about childhood fights and adventures of the poet's childhood days in Hatfield, Hertfordshire. *The After World* depicts the child's world when her parents are gone.

"Across them spreads your long hair-
it is still golden.

But you will not own anything-
except the sudden sunlight
shining through you parents' hallway
up into your bedroom.”³⁰

I would Like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro has a contemplative, introspective tone. ‘A dot’ symbolizes the lack of ego, the acceptance of *what is*, self-contentment, desirelessness and self-effacement. A dot has a potential of turning into alien, a picture, an animation, a dream and a dance.

“But it’s fine where I am.
I’ll never make out what’s going on
around me, and that’s the joy of it.

The fact that I’m not a perfect –circle
makes me more interesting in this world
people will state forever

Even the most unemotional get excited
so here I am, on the edge of animation,
a dream, a dance, a fantastic construction.”

On Dunton Bridge gives a vivid visual of a bridge that has witnessed the fight of a couple, the father clutching a sobbing little boy and the mother yelling at a girl in school uniform.

“They all stood turned to stone
like Dunton Bridge. And I froze too.”³¹

In *In News Paper*, the poet recollects her mother’s act of wrapping her cut-off plait in news paper.

“Free from snipping, splitting, perming, it waits
long years to be touched in awe
and splashed with lamplight.

It is an ear of black corn, ripened in newspaper
in my mother's room." ³²

Throwing Out My Father's Dictionary shows words growing shoots in the bins and changes taking place in spellings, punctuations and so on. The poet's father's dictionary contained his signature in the centre page. The poet has a bigger, weightier dictionary containing the latest entries but she dare not inscribe her name on it. The poet here wants to suggest that the language is always in flux and one cannot own or possess it by inscribing one's name. It eludes and escapes one's grasp.

Present from Pakistan contains poems on themes related to Pakistan. The first poem in this section *The Indian Cooking* describes the India style of cooking of keemo and khir with a variety of spices, colourful and aromatic. Melted ghee looks like lakes or golden rivers. The poet while tasting these recipes tastes the landscape of India.

Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan is one of the first poems she wrote. When she wrote the poem, she had not visited Pakistan, her father's original country. The speaker in the poem is about 13 years old. Her aunts had sent a peacock blue salwar kameez, an orange one, glass bangles and the jewellery from Pakistan. The salwar bottoms were broad and stiff and candy-striped glass bangles drew blood. Though she is fascinated by these colourful clothes and jewellery, she feels awkward wearing them. She longs for denim and corduroy. She contrasts the beautiful clothes and jewellery of India and Pakistan with monotonous English cardigans from Marks and Spenser. Then she recollects her journey with the family to England when she had prickly heat all over her body. She feels that her identity was uncertain and fragmented.

"I pictured my birth place

from fifties' photographs,
When I was older
there was conflict, a fractured land
throbbing through newsprint.”³³

The poem is written in free verse with stanzas of varying lengths and phrases arranged loosely across the page. The poem depicts a sequence of personal memories. There are associating as well as contrasting images. The tone of the poem is that of confusion caused by the dual pull of colourful Indian and Pakistani gifts and modern English denim and corduroy. She is unable to decide her identity as the past was invisible and indistinct while the present she could not completely identify with and therefore she experienced a sense split identity. At the end of the poem, she tries to imagine how it might have been if she'd lived in Lahore instead, and wonder whether she would have been more at home there or in England.

“sometimes I saw Lahore-
my aunts in shaded rooms,
screened from male visitors,
sorting presents
wrapping them in tissue
Or there were beggars, sweeper girls
and I was there-
of no fixed nationality,
Staring through fretwork
at the Shalimar Gardens.”³⁴

Luckbir is a pen-portrait of the poet's aunt who read Jane Austen but never lived beyond the confines of a home. She did not take a job or an evening class. She died young and the poet's uncle could never forget his beautiful companion with red lips, draped in colourful, gorgeous saris.

The Country at My Shoulder is a title poem that tells of the burden of one's inheritance and culture. It refers to Pakistan without naming, the country of her birth where under the military rule, public execution took place in the square. Women cry at the sight. Shedding tears on their wet dupatta, women toil hard breaking stones. The poet says:

“I try to shake the dust from the country,
Smooth it with my hands.”³⁵

Alvi says that the country has become her body that she cannot break hits off. The mixed identity of the poet does not let her rest. She says:

“I water the country with English rain,
Cover it with English Words
Soon it will burst, or fall like a meteor.”³⁶

Identity labels and canons of culture are often so strong that they do not allow easy flow of cultural assimilations. This conflict caused by mixed nationality and upbringing can be seen clearly in Alvi's poetry. However, in Moniza Alvi's poetry, there is a conscious attempt to break free from fixed representation of gender, race and culture. She is in fact, alien to the culture of her birth country, Pakistan and that her connection with it is surreal and fantastical. It becomes the symbol of other losses for her.

The poem *Sari* is symbolic depiction of the poet's culture. The Sari is not just a cloth but that which “Stretched from Lahore to Hyderabad, Wavered cross the Arabian Sea, Shot through with stars”³⁷. Alvi has written several poems where she refers to India, the undivided Bharat before partition. She says in *Map of India*:

“India is manageable-smaller than
My hand- the Mahanadi river
Thinner than my life line.”³⁸

(The Country at My Shoulder, 37)

When Jaswinder Lets Loose Her Hair expresses the poet's memory of Jaswinder's long stream like hair "that could run around mosque" for which she craves. *The Draught* describes the Indian weather in the mountains in winter. Alvi's tone of diasporic discontent is always mild and mellow. In *When We Ask to Leave Our City*, the poet says:

"They say
Why don't you instead
cut off your hair
tamper with the roots?

So we ask to leave the Earth forever.

They say *What! Leave the Earth forever?*
And they offer a kind of umbilical cord
To connect us up to the coldest stars.

We'll stay in our city
opt for decent bread
lean our unruly heads
against the wall." ³⁹

The Bed, the last poem of the collection *The Country at My Shoulder* symbolizes home, the country and one's shelter that can hold the tempests of one's dreams.

"We'll have river
in the middle of the bed-
Where in the ancient song
the King's horses could all drink together." ⁴⁰

The poet longs for the country where people of different races, cultures and religions can live happily and amicable. Thus, Alvi's

collection *The Country at My Shoulder* describes issues of identity, home and exile. Her later volumes of poetry *Soul* (2002) and *How the Stone Found its Voice* (2005) show how her cultural transformation transcends beyond 'English' or 'Asian' to effect an original self-reinvention of her individualism and identity. Alvi also exhibits glaringly distinct Indian influence. Pakistan evokes a sense of strangeness to her but Indian influence on her poetic sensibility is firmly imprinted which her poetry exhibits time and again.

Souls is a collection of 79 short poems dealing with the image of soul. It is interesting to note that Moniza Alvi plays with the idea of the soul in a quite different manner. For her, soul is not a spiritual concept but the spirit that gives meaning to life and existence. Souls give presents of nothingness which is the most sensible gift of all. It clashes with nothing. The idea of NOTHINGNESS is central to the Zen Buddhism, Taoism and many spiritual paths. Alvi does not philosophize the concept of the soul but deals with it in a playful manner- Souls advise people

*“Collect nothing
which isn't infinitely collectible.”*⁴¹

In a poem *Travellers*, Alvi says that those who are well-equipped with life's experiences are good travelers. In a poem 'Lost Souls', she writes:

*“Lost souls are not always lost
They inhabit us as if our faces
were portraits in galleries-”*⁴²

In Indian philosophy, souls are considered immortal. *The Gita* says that soul never dies: only body perishes. She echoes the idea of immortality in the poem *Immortals* in the following words:

*“We only know about life
To the Souls,*

we're the real immortals.”⁴³

In a poem *The Worst Thing*, the poet says:

“The worst thing for the Souls
is forgetting how to fly.”⁴⁴

Escape describes souls' elusive nature, their habit of playing, truant and hiding in lifts and murky stairwells.”

“However hard we press down
on the lid, out they come
out of the box.”⁴⁵

Shirt on the Line is a marvellous poem depicting altogether a new way of looking at the idea of the soul. The poet says that the souls are not always serious, they are fun-loving. The soul like a wind fills, out the white shirt on the line and the sleeves riotously sway and flap.

“The empty shirt is a joy
for an hour the souls forget
what they carry with them,

have no idea whether
it is a happy childhood
or a great weariness.”⁴⁶

Great and Small shows that there is nothing small or great. In fact, the small is a great thing. There is something special in the second.

“The second is the great thing,
not the years, the days,
the protected minutes
The souls know so well,
the particles of time,
their scent,

their explosive nature.”⁴⁷

In *Stranger*, Moniza Alvi says that each soul is stranger to the other. Each soul passes down the thoroughfare in its separate disguise. When they collide, they are confused because they cannot easily tell whether it is themselves or the other. The poem *Hotel* expresses the popular India idea of the soul dwelling in a house temporarily and then moving into some other place. Moniza Alvi compares the body with a hotel, a temporary home, spongy and leaky place with heart like Big Ben presiding over it.

“Perhaps the soul is drawn
to the body’s holes and windows’
knowing that one day
it will surely leave
without a backward glance
was the body really such a good hotel?”⁴⁸

Two Dates says that in fact in our frenetic years of life, the souls have no need for diaries or calendars. For them only, two dates are important, the date of birth and the date of the final adieu.

“Two dates which bind together
our existence.”⁴⁹

Moniza Alvi always emphasises the fact we are all strangers and our home is nowhere. It is the trick of the light that we are tempted into believing that it is our home. *This Town* depicts the guiding aesthetic of Alvi’s poetry that we are all immigrants and we are all strangers to ourselves.

“This town we think is home,
Is somewhere else. Abroad.
Every night we travel
miles and miles to get here...

.....

Even our breath is scarcely
our own-the Souls maintain
they give it as a gift.
Quite casually.”⁵⁰

Nothing is another short poem showing that “Nothing is more precious than life”. Souls shed everything and desperately cling to ‘nothing’, holding it closely as if it were a child. Emptiness, nothingness, vacuum contain potential for holding, possibility for being filled with something. Therefore the very idea of nothingness is very important in spirituality. As a diasporic poet, Moniza Alvi reiterates the idea that immigrancy is the essence of life. We are all immigrants, moving to some alien land, not knowing where we are heading and where our home is. The very concept of ‘NOHOME’ or homelessness paves way for home everywhere, anywhere.

In *Go Back to England*, Moniza Alvi describes how she felt a sense of being a stranger in Lahore where she was born and lived there briefly. After her birth, when she was a few months old, she was taken to England. Her English mother felt it necessary that the baby needed to be brought up in England. In Pakistan, she wailed endlessly detesting the heat and the cold of the region.

“Go back to England
said the stones and boulders.

Go back to England
urged the dusty grass

*

*

July gasped in the heat
the day we loft Model Town

My mother hoped to be
a different mother.

The ocean knew
I would be translated

into an English Girl.”⁵¹

In this poem, Alvi ironically expresses the loss of a birth nation’s inheritance and cultural translation forged by the multiplicity of cultures. *The Boy from Bombay* describes lost children who are taken to Switzerland and adopted by Swiss parents. Years later, when the boy looks into the mirror and pictures himself for a moment somewhere else in Mumbai, under the yellow basalt of the Gateway of India.

“He strains to see
as if he could uncover
the full story.
As if he could untie
a boat on the lake
row it from one world
to another-
backwards and forwards
through the sunlight
and the shadows”⁵²

Moniza Alvi’s *How the Stone Found its Volume* (2005) shows how her cultural transformation goes beyond just being “English” or “Asian”. It offers oblique perspectives on the global conflict of divided cultures. The collection contains poem about her childhood, subtle adaptations of the French poet Jules Supervielle, moving pieces elderly parents and her own experiences of motherhood. Then there are also poems that adopt the voice of a husbands peaking about his wife, the subject which she had earlier explored in the collection *Carrying My Wife* (2000). The pomes in this collection conjure darker, even apocalyptic perspectives. The titles themselves are suggestive of their

apocalyptic nature: *How the City Lost Its Colour, How the Countries Stopped Away*. The poem *How A Long Way Off Rolled Itself Up* begins like children's story "Once there was a place called Long Way off" where trees grew upside down and houses appeared to have been turned inside out. The idea of a distant place recurs in many of Alvi's poems. In a poem *For My Daughter*, she hints that her daughter too was there with a whisper of another continent in her bones. Alvi conjures up larger themes and landscapes with gentleness and ease. What links the poems in the collection is the overriding sense of not belonging of fragility, even our relationship with ourselves. This feeling of fragility echoes in her adaptations of Supervielle poems. For example, the final poem of the collection starts as a poem addressed to a child but soon it turns into the speaker's own elusive bold on pat. The speaker says:

"I'm convinced you're my childhood
haunting a favourite place.
Your hide from me, embarrasses." ⁵³

Moniza Alvi often, refers to the sense of being strangers to ourselves. In one poem, old age is described as the experience of living inside of a jar filled with marmalade in which it is difficult to move or enjoy the simple pleasures of life. The final section adopts the voice of a husband as he speaks about the subtleties and complexities of life. These delicate and surreal poems explore the fragility of marriage, of belonging and nor longing to someone else. In a poem 'After Escher', the husband bemoans the seemingly impossible attempt to write about his wife accurately ad factually.

"She slides away from herself,
in anger, or mischief. I sigh,
tempted to fling down my pen
My wife is rarely my wife." ⁵⁴

This human predicament is both a matter of despair and of reconciliation that nothing or no one is unchanging or the same. We should be prepared and willing to accept the ever-changing current of existence.

Europa is a collection of poems by Moniza Alvi that explores post dramatic stress disorder and the meaning of rape while mining the international politics of east and west through the myth of Europa. Europa was a Lebanese princess and her father ruled a city the Greek called Tyre. Its name, Sur in Phoenician, Tzor in Hebrew meant 'Rock'. Tyre's princess symbolizes the first human example of rape in Western history.

Alvi's poems explore and restage the vulnerability of both women and a rock through the rape of Europa, when the world's divine ruler himself, disguised as a bull raped her. The bull offered a lift to Europa who clung on its back and carried her over the sea to Crete and raped her there. Europa's son was Minos, the father of Crete's royal family whose lives were hall marked by bulls ever after. As Europa was tricked by a bull, Minos's wife Pasiphae tricked a bull into sex and bore the Minotaur, half man, half bull. Theseus killed Minotaur with the help of Ariadne, Mino's daughter, but finally married her sister Phaedra who caused the death of Theseus's son Hippolytus by falsely accusing him of rape. Hippolytus died facing another bull from the sea.

The bull, mark of Crete, stands for violence, abandonment and rape. The role that Moniza Alvi reinvents for Europa is that of Anderson's little mermaid, who sacrifices her scaly tail for the love of a prince. Like Theseus, the prince marries someone else while the girl's human legs hurt her like knives. Moniza Alvi associated this mythological politics. Europa is a muslim girl whose head scarf in post 9/11 Europa is a divisive badge of an alien culture. Europa is also a girl in an honour killing, who becomes prey of the reaction to 9/11

holocaust. What Alvi wants to suggest is the vulnerability of the innocent in violence of all kinds. The terrorist attack killed innocent people while the reaction it generated all targeted innocent people. The real culprits always escape whether in mythologies or in real life.

Europa is the girl whose name gave western culture its identity: a girl invaded, a girl who represents all violent traffic between East and West. In Alvi's treatment of Europa myth, the echoes of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine problem ring clearly. Alvi's voice is never outrageously rebellious; it is gentle, modest, patient and disciplined. Peace eludes the world always hiding in the dark limbs of intolerance, violence and mindless acts of terror. Europa's father is unable to recognize her and the emperor of the world apologizes to Europa with his head bowed down shamefully. These poems can be seen as looking at both psychological and cultural split again. They are fine examples of surreal poems presented through intensely lyrical language. However, Moniza Alvi says that what a poet can do is to bear witness to the damage marvelling how the ink clings to the nib, the tray miracle. Poetry is a tiny miracle that survives all disasters proving that wounds of violence heal and poetry glitters like a tiny star on a dark night.

Jean Arsanayagam is a Sri Lankan poet whose poetry presents genuine diasporic anguish and ethnic conflict which minority has to face. Born to a Burgher family as Jean Solomons in Kandy, Sri Lanka, Jean Arsanayagam received her schooling in Kandy and graduated from the University of Ceylon. She married a Tamil Youngman named Thiyagrajah Arsanayagam and she has personally known the insecurity and fear experienced by the Tamil community during attack on Tamils in the post independence period.

Jean began to publish her works in the early 1970's and they have been widely published in English and have been translated in Danish, Swedish, French, German and Japanese languages. Jean

Arsanayagam won the national award for non-fiction literature in 1984.

Her major poetical works include:

Kindura (1973)

Poems of Season Beginning and a Season Over (1977)

Apocalypse '83 (1984)

Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems (1985)

Out of Our Prisons We Emerge (1987)

Trial by Terror (1987)

Reddened Waters Flow Clear (1991)

Shooting the Floricans (1993)

Besides being a renowned poet, Jean Arsanayagam is an excellent prose writer too. Her prose works have earned her recognition and fame. These works include:

The Cry of a Kite (A collection of short stories – 1984)

The Outsider (1989)

Fragments of a Journey (1992)

All is burning (1995)

Peacocks and Dreams (1996)

In the Garden Secretly and other Stories (2000)

Dragons in the Wilderness (A Novel) (2008)

The Cry of a Kite is a collection of intense poetic description of the bare, desert like landscape in the neighbourhood of Jaffna in Northern Sri Lanka, the traditional homeland of the Tamils. It portrays the decay of small villages, their marginalization on account of rapid modernization. *Peacock and Dreams* is a series of political vignettes from Tamil village life. *Fragments of a journey* and 'All is burning' exhibit Jean's strength as a painter and explorer. She is a minute observer with an eye for details. She seldom tells a straight forward story in a conventional manner. Some her stories explore the bitter truth of ageing and loneliness. Her prose work displays her insightful deeply psychological characters, circular composition and poetical

melodious pose. In her short stories, she expresses something more than transience and decay. It is an attempt to express the enigma of existence and presence of God. She emphasizes the fact that the old religions need to be protected against a new age of brutality and ethnic intolerance. There are contradictions in religions, no enmity among gods and prophets. All religions lead to love, equality and brotherhood.

Jean Arsanayagam has spent her childhood in a small provincial town of Kudugannava and her experience of this place is reflected in her works. After her graduation, she got her M.Litt from Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Scotland. She taught English language at St. Anthony's college and also lectured at the University of Peradeniya. Since independence from colonial rule, Sri Lanka has passed through severe ethno-political conflict. The inter racial conflict between the majority Sinhalese and Tamil minority has caused a large scale communal violence in Sri Lanka again and again. With the rise of Tamil militancy led by Prabhakaran since the eighties, the country has been ravaged by bloody war till death recently causing death, destruction and displacement of lakhs of people from their homeland.

Like many other ethnic Tamils, Jean's family had been victimized and was forced to flee the war zone as refugee in 1983. This experience created an identity crisis within her which impelled her to express the anguish and sufferings caused by ethnic conflict in her works. On a personal level, she too underwent profound sufferings and pain as a war refugee. The nurses' attitude was also divisive and discriminatory in those refugee camps. Jean Arsanayagam's home had been attacked by a frenzied mob as she and her husband belonged to a minority. She and her sister escaped death quite narrowly. Jean had taught in both schools and universities. As a teacher, she had never experienced social alienation in the beginning but ethnic violence made her realize that ethnic intolerance spares no one. She felt that her past life as a teacher was of no value. Police officers acted like stooges and

desperate refugees crowded in school rooms and school compounds. It was even difficult to find a space for standing. In Sri Lanka, teachers faced grinding poverty. Ethnic violence disrupted education system in Sri Lanka completely. For the first time, she experienced the fear of being thought alien, the other.

Jean Arsanayagam comes from Neil Burgher community which reminds her of her colonial past. Her father was a white man. Power and authority embodied in him. She wanted to belong to that part of her identity which would ensure her recognition and respectable place in society. It also meant that she must reject another part of her identity – her mother's way of life. In fact, her father had not married her mother but he always wanted his childhood to be raised the way that had legitimized his own existence in his world. All through her life, Jean questioned the source of her birth. She felt that she was a new hybrid flower, her colourings, markings were distinctive. She felt that her mother was like a natural plant, the ungrafted bud, pure and undefiled but they (Jean and her siblings) could not cling to that vine and naturally, the severance was quite painful.

Separated from her mother by patriarchal will Jean, with her present knowledge of colonial debate looks at her identity crisis from a very personal angle.

“To whom did I owe my true allegiance? To my father's people or my mother's? Her people were subjugated, caught up as they were in that historical process of colonialism. The subjugation was further extended by possession of her body, but when I looked upon my father in my childhood. I did not consider him in that light.”⁵⁵

Jean has visited number of countries on her academic tours. She had faced harassment by immigration and airport authorities on account of being a Sri Lankan. Her experience as an academician

during her visit to different countries provides her ample scope to compare the effects of colonialism on different cultures. Jean has visited India several times where she feels “at home outside her home”

The personal suffering of her life has given her wider perspectives on human sufferings. She merges her little, personal self with the greater, higher self or humanity. In her poetry as well as in her prose works, there is a marked autobiographical element that mirrors her innocent, peace-loving soul. In the middle of bloodshed, chaos, horror and humiliation, she experiences a contradictory sense of freedom.

“Someone smashed in the door
And gave me my freedom
To walk out into the World
free, free from the prison of myself.”⁵⁶

Jean Arsanayagam like other Dutch Burghers was the offspring of a union of a Dutch colonizer and a woman of indigenous community. The split inheritance makes her proclaim thus:

“I have suckled on a breast shaped
by the genetics of history.”⁵⁷

In the beginning, Jean Arsanayagam felt that she was an outsider but when she and her family become refugees during ethnic violence. She realized that she was no longer an outsider or onlooker but she was in it. Now that it happened on her, she felt, “A last history has meaning.” Her uncertainty about her identity gives her both the feeling of being a “Trishanku” and also of freedom from the burden of any fixed inheritance and history.

Before one reads Jean Arsanayagam’s poetry, one needs to understand ethnic-political situation in Sri Lanka. The modular form of European nationhood undertook radical changes in their dialectical

enter counter with the colonies. Representative politics shifted from representation to representativeness in the Asian arena; which is supported to guarantee the principle of equal citizenship based on the idea of anonymous and homogeneous civil society. Colonial practice of census-taking has generated a powerful numerical imagination among the colonized people aiding in expanding their race and community consciousness. This naturally translates into a politics of numbers where the majority justifies domination. In case of Sri Lanka, the Sinhala – Buddhist community being the largest majority claimed that it had a natural right to dominate and rule over the other minorities. In Sri Lanka, it was frequently argued that the Tamils were a pampered minority under colonial rule and needed to be ‘Kept in place.’ So, their move to restrict their number in education, administration professions etc. was only the just way of restoring balance. In post- colonial Sri Lanka, comradeship became limited to an exclusive ethnic group while others were pushed to the periphery.

Jean Arsanayagam’s poetry should be read in this context as her poetry captures a unique and complex response to exclusionary nationalist rhetoric of post – colonial Sri Lanka. As a writer of Dutch Burgher origin, married to a Tamil that as the largest and politically most assertive minority in Sri Lanka, and living in the largely Sinhala dominated southern region of the country. Jean Arsanayagam’s works echo her long-term engagement with the multiple heritages that inform her identity. And what emerges in her writing is uncomfortable hybridity causing serious problem of self definition. Under the sign of post-colonial nation and its hegemonic discourses, Jean Arsanayagam’s works seek its specific space. In politics of domination, no domination is ever total as the dominated create a zone of autonomy. In Jean Arsanayagam’s works, one can explore this zone of autonomy and contradictions.

One of the earliest works of Jean Arsanayagam, *Kindura*, and the title poem represents the ambiguous perspectives of hybridity. The poem uses half-human, half bird form depicted in the Buddhist legend *Sanda Kinduru Jatakayato* suggest a potential for autonomy that might or might not be realized fully:

“Feathers slice off your waist,
Tail plumes splay the air,
Claws grasp earth,
Fingers touch flute.
Music twitters from those human lips
Your imperturbable profile
Does not suggest
Discrepancy of his embodiment
Yet your folded wings
Unruffled feathers
Suggest an immobility
of flight arrested,
And I see in my own
submerged personality
A strange restless
Ghost of Kindura”⁵⁸

Kindura being, both avian and human contains hybridity, its people ‘imperturbable’. However this flamboyant spirit becomes motionless and arrested in flight. The doubleness of Kindura – its capacity for dynamic action and artistic performance hybridized with the potential unrealized renders its problematic as the sign of the poet’s own self-identity as a woman and poet. The last lines bring her mixed feelings on “submerged personality” as the ghost of Kindura. It is really interesting to note that Jean Arsanayagam in her early work draws inspiration from the Buddhist legend. In the Sinhala imagination, the Sinhalese people are supposed to be the chosen custodians of the Buddhism and Sri Lanka, the sanctuary of Buddhism. Jean

Arsanayagam's adoption of the symbol of Kindura is an attempt to replace a hybrid consciousness in a majoritarian discourse that justifies itself in a singular and immemorial tradition promoted as authentically local. Most of her works is characterized by this ambivalence where a marginalized identity struggles to assert its autonomy from and yet seeks articulation with dominant identity formations.

In her poems written after a decade, in the aftermath of the 1983 anti Tamil racial violence, of which she was an unwitting victim, there is a different manifestation of this ambivalence. She who considered herself 'outsider' suddenly found herself 'in'. She writes:

"It's all happened before and will happen again
And we the onlookers
But now Jim in it
It's happened to me
At last history has a meaning." ⁵⁹

These lines that occur in a poem titled *1958.. 71...77...81...83* deal with the history of repetitive violence. Having perceived the incidents of violence as an "onlooker", she now encounters it as a victim realizing that history has a 'meaning' for who are affected by it. Regi Siriwardena notes that in *Apocalypse '83* the poems are spontaneous and profound accounts a fatality of violence, but in her later poetry "she begins to dwell more identity and belonging that arise from the trauma of what happened to her and her family in 1983." ⁶⁰

It is clearly marked that 1983 was a significant event in her literary career that brought forth note of urgency and political awareness in her works. She starts investigating her self-identity and position within a society she has inhabited from birth but now finds it inimical. This investigation generates a space for individual autonomy. The sense of mythic calm and poise of Kindura is no more here. The hybrid consciousness has hardened and solidified in to a minority

consciousness aware of impending threat from majority. What emerges from the personal encounter with the violence of exclusionary politics and ethno-nationalism is a strong and resolute desire to seek a place, to belong.

Post-83 writing of Jean Arsanayagam exhibits of the Buddhist mythological references that she has visited in *Kindura*. One can suggest that she is probably disillusioned by the fact that the religion that preaches peace and compassion (Karuna) resolved to such a mindless violence. Whatever the reasons, there is for greater awareness and investigation of the two minimized communities and their traditions that shape her cultural identity- Dutch Burgher and Tamil. It is here that her works explore the complex issue of nationalism and its exclusionary discourses. Her writing redefines the Sri Lankan post-colonial space and marks it out as a space of multicultural heritages in place of unitary logic of nationalism. She is aware of the fact that in spite of her desire to belong, she is persistently marked as alien. Thus, there co-exists her desire to belong and the process of re-writing her aliens. Her reinvention of alienation becomes both critical irony and poetic urgency.

In post-85 writings of Jean Arsanayagam, we see that the Burgher dimension finds expression in her poetical works repeatedly. The Dutch Burghers were a miniscule numerical minority that enjoyed a position of wealth and high status in society in colonial Sri Lanka. In colonial times, the Burgher community enjoyed prominent place in medical and legal sectors. They also considered themselves self-styled modernizers. However, since independence in 1948, their numbers dwindle and their social and economic position was threatened. In the sphere of cultural life, they suffered the worst alienation. The Sinhalese used the word 'lansi' to denote their marginalized identity and aliens against the native Sinhalese who considered themselves the children of the soil, the *bhumiputrayo*.

In the collection *A Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems* published in 1985, the speaker's voice self-consciously seeks out the history of violence and exploitation that marks the advent of the Dutch in Sri Lanka. The poem titled *Epics* offers an example:

“In the garden of the museum
Cannon rests, within glass case
Artefacts of time. Minted coins a braded
Silver larine, golden guilders, starrers,
Ancient swords stained with rust
And blood. Firearms antique,
And in my face- a semblance.”⁶¹

‘Cannon’ and ‘blood stained coins’ symbolize colonial violence and economic exploitation by the colonizers. The poet looks at these artefacts through a glass case, and on the glass surface her reflection is super imposed palimpsestically upon the coins which reminds her of her own connection to the colonial history. In post colonial context like Sri Lanka, the museum serves both as a reminder of a glorious pre-colonial past and also destruction and violent bloodshed caused by colonialism. The marginalization of the Burghers is also the outcome of the colonial legacy as in the distorted bearers of colonial legacy. Jean Arsanayagam does not keep silent over the exploitative colonial history of the Dutch Burghers. In *Genealogies*, Jean Arsanayagam says:

“Have I no shame, no guilt
That my inheritance came
with sword and gun?

I am of their love,
Not of their hate,
Perhaps of their lust,
The consummation
Of some brief bliss

That filled the cradle,
Brimmed the grave,
I am their ultimate dream.”⁶²

The consummation of some brief bliss’ suggests the transient nature of brief physical union which leads to birth and also love, hope and capacity for dreams. The images of ‘miracle’ and ‘cradle’ remind the readers of another birth, resurrection and promise of peace and love, the birth of Christ.

Jean Arsanayagam work seeks a broader identification with the sufferings of women who had been victim of colonialism and patriarchy. In her collection *Shooting the Floricans*, there is a poem titled *Maarden-Huis-The House of Virgins Amsterdam/Kalpitiya*, the poet chronicles the sufferings of Dutch-orphan virgins who were brought to Sri Lanka to be sexual partners of second class Dutch colonizers. The tombstone of Johanna Vander Beck was engraved with an epitaph “died in the childbed at fifteen/Buried with her infant Pieter Jacobus”. It sands forlorn at Kalpitiya in Dutch fort. Her tombstone inspires the narrator to identity with the young Johanna in her alien tropical Kalpitiya’. She had endured the rough passage on a ship full of

“The sweat and
Blood of men rotting with scurvy”.
She was destined to be sexually exploited and,
“To bed with some humble
Foot soldier, halbedeer or pikeman.”⁶³

The narrative of the poem is mimetic of resurrection and rebirth through pain and suffering. In Arsanayagam’s long poem *Exile Childhood*, the poetic person asks with self irony,

“Who brought us anachronisms of that age?
We were part of an Empire’s glory.”⁶⁴

However, the identity of the Dutch Burghers was like that of the stilt workers who walk on a pair of upright poles supporting the feet. It was unnatural and artificially elevated by traditions. Finally, they are shown to disappear in the dark. The poetic persona's predicament is very much a kin to that of the self alienated colonized individual whom Fanon calls a self that has in some ways 'served' the other and 'othered' the self.⁶⁵

Jean Arsanayagam feels alienated from her own past as she recognizes it as the source of her present alienation from others. It is no longer the image of mythical 'Kindura' that symbolises the persona's desire to find a place in Sri Lanka's contemporary cultural ecology. The image now articulates the persona's desire but to be recognized as a migrant and foreign who is also assimilated in a unique manner. Jean Arsanayagam's connection with Tamil culture through marriage and her experiences of violence post-83 periods creates a complicated relationship of belonging and not belonging with Tamil culture. The Tamils are a more dominant presence in Sri Lanka compared to the Burghers; only next to the Sinhalese and as a Dutch Burgher; she was not so welcomed among the Tamil Hindus even by her mother-in-law and other members of her husband's family. Cultural collision is depicted in some of her poems very affectively. However, in her later poems as Siramohan observes, the mythologizing the relationship gives meaning to the daughter-in-law's life who "coming down in the line of women serving women" lives out the myth of the goddess.⁶⁶

According to Siramohan, the relationship of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law breaks away from their socialized identities as Tamil Hindu and Dutch Burgher Christian and finds a common ground where women serve women mythologizing the images of goddess and devotee. In her poem titled *Poet* she thinks of herself as a common women, opposed to the institution of society where in she says that within her lies a power of creation known only to herself.

“I watch her
She takes the helm of her garment and
Wipes the sweat off her brow
The thin cotton is damp and stained.

She tells herself,
‘I am common
Anonymous like all others
Here
No one knows that I have magic
in my brain.”⁶⁷

The poets like women are anonymous but they have magic in their brains that work miracles. This is the magic of imagination that allows her to express the sufferings of her fellow beings. Her poetry also seeks a space for all those who are marginalized due to exclusionary nationalist politics. As a Diaspora poet in Sri Lanka, Jean Arsanayagam seeks to live and write within Sri Lanka as she writes from within the nation and as one who wishes to belong to it. Unlike some other diasporic poets, she does not claim to be a global citizen moving across the borderless world but she desires for a place locate herself in Sri Lanka, the country where she was born and brought and married. She remains very much a part of the post-colonial Sri Lanka where multiculturalism is not the part of exclusive nationalist rhetoric.

The poem *Ruined Gopuram* depicts the description of a Hindu temple during the riots. Jean Arsanayagam is more concerned about the intolerant attitude of the people towards other than the act of the destruction of the temple. The riots destroyed not only the temples or religious places but the lives of many people. After the attacks on the temples,

“There are no bells
left for the mourning.”

The poem reveals the inhuman nature of the mob destroying symbols of faith and the lives of the innocent people.

In the Month of July arouses the emotions of pity and terror that depicts the cruelty of the mob. “All evenings the pyres burn” suggests the ceaseless acts of killings of the innocent people. She laments the destruction of the landscape that has changed beyond recognition. War has bulldozed houses along with the lives of the people. The ultimate message that Jean Arsanayagam gives us is that of love, the love for the land she has made her own, the love for her husband whose home is Sri Lanka, and the love for alien Tamil culture towards which she feels attracted. Jean Arsanayagam recaptures childhood very vividly in *Mythologies of Childhood*. Childhood for her is a magical medley of gods, their consorts, myths and legends. In *The Inventory*, she says that her spirit roams like a silver-linked astral body to look on generations of family portraits; “a mother, draped in Varanasi Silk of family heirlooms still paraded. It tells me many stories, this inventory... I had ventured in to that/grove where they had their beginnings. When the wars began everything was destroyed. No one left/nothing is left/ only shadowy memories” and as she closes the inventory she feels that possessions were not part of her baggage, no impediments were on her way no territories to guard, and no inherited arrogance. In *The Sutradhar– Narrator of Fragments From Family Sagas* where she recollects family sagas and her father-in-law.

A Nice Burgher Girl is a story of a personal quest in the land of ‘the others’. The book is a slim volume detailing Jean Arsanayagam’s story of life in pre independence times. Its pages are filled with highly lyrical prose and poetry. It describes sounds, sights, smells, people and places and also her journeys and exploration. It cannot be called a story but an exploitation of the self and community.

Memories, self-exploration and discovery, in heritage these are the corner stone's of Jean Arsanayagam's creative output. Her ancestors had come as the servants of the Dutch East India Company. They were also called 'Free Burghers' who came to the colonized land for trade and commerce. Some women also follow their men folk. After the British took over the land, many Dutch Burghers left but others opted to remain, adapting the English language and Sri Lanka as their home. As the British rule consolidated, the people of Dutch origin and those from other European countries who had migrated to the colony during the Dutch colonial rule began to a distinct community. Their European ancestry and the use of English language gave them certain advantages in trade, commerce, education, medical and legal professions.

Jean Arsanayagam belongs to this community who never thought that the land which she has come to love as her own would reject her as being an alien. Her connections with the Tamil culture through marriage placed her life in double jeopardy.

In *A Nice Burgher Girl*, Jean Arsanayagam recollects her childhood experience both good and bad. She has opened her life to the readers very candidly making them participate in her personal odyssey. Her keen observation makes all her works a feast of sensuous experiences.

Women, All women (2000) is a selection of poems of Jean Arsanayagam from her old collections as well as new ones. The poems focus on the themes related to women searching for her daughter's beloved among the dead bodies of two hundred men. Here she alludes to the violent conflicts in Sri Lanka. She depicts cruelty, violence, poverty, ageing very poignantly. At times, she recollects her own childhood putting herself at the centre of the poems. There are, then poems that deal with the life of the poet's marriage away by her

new Tamil family and how she was treated by her domineering tradition bound mother-in-law. She was treated as an outsider by her in-laws but she portrays them with sympathy and tolerance. She even tries to win the love and sympathy of her mother-in-law and succeeds to some extent. She comes to adore the matriarchal culture that treats women with reverence and devotion. There are also poems that describe cultural walls that created alienness and sense of dislocation but these cultural walls; she seems to emphasize, provided security and sense of 'home' to these women. In one of her poems, she gives us a portrait of her mother-in-law tragic old age.

There are poems that deal with her encounters with women from different places and communities. She feels that all women share almost the same kind of problems in their routine, non-glamorous life. As a narrator in a poem says:

"I too lead an ordinary life
Wash my own clothes
Heat kettle's of water
See that rice does not get burnet." ⁶⁸

These poems depict the sense of loss of worlds as well as values which is very often a common lot of all women including the poet herself. Jean Arsanayagam's work is intensely personal while her fiction is deeply political as it is concerned with her identity in post-colonial country torn by violence and strife. Growing fundamentalism and cultural intolerance pose a question before all so-called civilized societies of the world: Are we really civilized? Jean Arsanayagam is a diasporic poet with a difference. She writes in the red ink of her own blood and that is what makes her poetry deeply disturbing but cathartic as well.

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Chapter – 5

Conclusion

The study of Diaspora literature is highly relevant in our times as during the last century, there has been mass migration from south Asian countries to the European countries like England, Sweden etc. and particularly to the USA and Canada. In past, under colonial race, there has been migration from India and other South Asian countries to European colonies like Fiji, Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad as indentured labor. Abolition of slavery in European colonies of the Western hemisphere between 1834 and 1873 created the need for a new source of labor. In areas where land was scarce, such as the Caribbean islands, newly freed slaves were forced back to work on plantations. In areas where land was plentiful, such as Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad, former slaves took up independent subsistence farming.

The plantations workers were supplied by the system called indentured labor (girmitia). Natives of India agreed to work for a fixed number of years in one of the colonies for a meager wage, plus room and board. Most of the labor force came from north central and north eastern India and also from south regions. Most of them were Hindus and a few Muslims. In the 1840's, labors started coming to Trinidad in the Caribbean, Guyana in South Africa, and Mauritius off the coast of Africa. In the 1860's the laborers began to come to the British colony of Natal in South Africa for whose rights Mahatma Gandhi fought later and invented a new weapon called 'Satyagraha'. During 1870's the indented laborers came to a Dutch colony in Surinam and in 1880's to Fiji. In 1920, the indenture system was abolished but immigration to colonial areas still continued.

Sri Lanka, which was a British colony, some Tamils migrated there to work on the tea plantations. South Asians went to Malaya, then a British colony to work on rubber plantation. In the last quarter of 19th century, Indian laborers/workers migrated to Myanmar (Burma) to work on the plantations or for other menial jobs. Some South Asians who migrated to South East Africa were not indentured or contract laborers. They had come

to build railways and stayed as low ranking civil servants, shop keepers and professional. Many of such migrants were from Gujarat, Punjab and Goa.

The 20th century saw a new dimension of immigration from South Asian countries to the older destinations and also to new ones – U.S., Canada, the U.K. and European countries and later to Australia and the Middle East too. Immigrations to the US took place in two waves, the first between 1907 to 1924 and the second starting from 1965 to the present day. The first wave consisted mainly of Sikhs from Punjab, and Muslims. By 1900, nearly one million South Asians had migrated to the USA, among them a large percentage of the South Asians in the second wave were educated professionals. South Asian immigration to Canada started at beginning of the 20th century. The majority of these immigrants were from the Punjab. During 1963 and 1967, the restriction of immigration laws were relaxed and a large number of immigrants came from South Asian countries that included Sikhs from the Punjab, Hindu from Gujarat, Mumbai and Delhi, Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Christian from Kerala, Parsis from Bombay and Buddhists from Sri Lanka. Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis began to come to the UK in 1950's and 1960's. By mid-80's South Asians composed more than half of non-white populations in the U.K. Some South Asians also settled in Australia and New Zealand. South Asian professionals were also drawn to Austria and Germany. Germany granted political asylum to Tamil refugees who fled Sri Lanka during Ethnic conflicts.

Among the South Asian diaspora, the Indian diaspora constitutes an important part, a unique force in world culture. The origins of the modern Indian diaspora lie mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation in the British Empire. Over the million Indians had fought on behalf of the empire in several wars including the Boer war and two World Wars. The dispersal of Indian labor and professionals had been a world-wide phenomenon. Their contribution in trade, commerce, art, culture and scientific advancement had been quite noteworthy. Indian communities across the world maintain some sort of tenuous link with their mother land, what binds them together in their food, culture, festivals, religion and certain

traditions like arranged marriage and so on. These Indian communities have their places of worship; they celebrate their festivals with gaiety and gusto and maintain ties with traditions in spite of economic development and modern, western life-style.

Diaspora literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken for economic, political or other reasons and agonizing sense of alienation in an alien land often resulting in intense nostalgia of home land, family, community, religion and one's mother tongue. Basically, Diaspora is a community living in exile. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Diaspora' as 'the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into new regions'. Under colonialisms, it refers to multifarious movements, involving, the temporary or permanent of people all over the world.

Originally, the term 'Diaspora' referred to denote the Jewish communities living outside the Holy land. It was used to designate the dispersal of the Jews and their forced exile to Babylonia. However, at present, the term 'Diaspora' applies to all those who live outside their countries for economic, political, and professional or other reasons. It can be summed up as "the voluntary or forcible movement of the people from their homelands into new regions". Homi Bhabha calls diasporas "gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering in the half life, half light of foreign tongues or in the uncanny fluency of author's language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of under development of other world lived restoratively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival, gathering the present".¹

The three major characteristics of Diaspora are (i) Dispersion (ii) Homeland orientation and (iii) Boundary maintenance. Cohen lists the following criteria for the Diaspora: (i) Dispersal or scattering (ii) collective trauma (iii) cultural flowering (iv) troubled relationship with the majority (v)

sense of community transcending national frontiers and (vi) promoting a return movement. Cohen also classifies Diasporas' into five types viz: victim Diaspora, labor Diaspora, trade Diaspora, imperial Diaspora and cultural Diaspora. The diasporic sensibility entails the sense of displacement, dislocation, exile, crisis of identity, nostalgia for homeland, hybridity, acculturation, acceptance and assimilation. This is reflected again and again in their writings. Due to modern technological advancement, travelling abroad has become easier and migration is usually voluntary rather than forced. In this context, the terms Diaspora have lost its original connotation. However, still the sense of yearning for homeland, attachment to traditions, religion and language give birth to Diasporic literature which is primarily concerned with the individual's or community's attachment to homeland. A migrant is a peripheral person, a creature on the edge. V.S. Naipaul very poignantly portrays the search of the Diaspora for roots in his novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

“To have lived without even attempting to
Lay claims to one's portion of the earth;
To have lived and died as one has been born,
Unnecessary and unaccommodated”²

Diasporic writings are often finding new angles to enter reality. Hybridity challenges cultural authorization and majoritarianism. One of the most important aspects of diasporic writing is that it interrogates and challenges the authority of history. In post modern era, the dispossessed and the marginal have broken their silence; they have become vocal and their voices have attracted the attention of the people all over the world. Through the diasporic writings, readers also learn the most enduring lessons for living and thinking.

The concept of home is very vital in the writings of the diaspora. There are polarities of attraction and repulsion experienced by the characters towards and from their homeland in their writings. For example, for sugar diapora, home means an end to wandering and putting down the roots while

for the masala diaspora, there is constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes. Diaspora is often described as Trishanku, the state of dangling self, uncertain identity, having nothing to stick to, and being neither here nor there. Migrants' writers are often endowed with plural/double insider/outsider syndrome.

The alienated consciousness of the writers using the English language is an important factor for those who unite in English, particularly South Asian writers. Diasporic Indian writers are often criticized for their western stance and criticism of everything native. Another characteristic of Indian diasporic writing in English is the writers' obsession with history and magic realism. Many Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh are obsessed with history and its impact on human destiny. Quote often, there is comparison between the native culture and the culture of the country where the writer has settled. Modern South Asian migrants are educated professionals and scholars. In spite of the fact, they are fragmented and dispersed; they form an interlinked community through writing, workshops, seminars, gatherings and internet. They have succeeded harnessing international readership for contemporary diasporic writings. The zone of marriage and family has also undergone radical change. Inter-racial marriages, international social, sexual relations have paved way for thematization of bisexuality, homosexuality and lesbianism in their writings. South Asian diasporic writers constitute a wide spectrum of religious, ethnic, cultural groups. Though most of them are secular in content, this diversity and distinct religious, cultural identity make their writings quite appealing.

In modern times, the concept of Indianness and East-West encounter has also changed considerably. Indian immigrants in different parts of the world differ from each other in their attitudes towards India, Indian religion and culture. Many of them are highly critical of India and Indian traditions. The Research work is confined to five South Asian diasporic women poets, three from India, one from Pakistan and one from Sri Lanka. They all represent diverse and yet somewhat similar diasporic sensibilities. The fact is that the diasporic literature is a broad term. It is quite varied and today, it

is an important part of multicultural literature. It is generally acknowledged that some of the most noteworthy literature produced in the UK and the USA is multicultural. In the countries like the USA, there are writers from Arab American, Asian Americans, Africans, Hispanic and Native American ethnic groups; one of the earliest Arabs immigrant poets to the USA were from Lebanon and Syria that included Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Amin Rihani. Gibran's 'The Prophet' is profoundly philosophical and spiritually uplifting.

African diaspora literature expresses the pangs of dislocation, displacement, exile and longing for roots. Awanoor, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo are some of the remarkable writers. There are also remarkable black American writers like Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, August Wilson, Rita Dove, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelo and Paul Marshall etc.

South Asian diaspora, writers comprise of the writers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka etc. The South Asian diasporic writings have received unprecedented attention of the readers from all over the world mainly through fiction. Poetry has remained comparatively a less traversed area. In the dissertation, five diasporic women poets have been chosen whose poetries express diasporic sensibilities in distinct, individual manner. The South Asian diasporic literature contains certain common characteristics that can briefly be summed up as below:

- The works of these writers call attention to the idea of Empire and interrogate colonial history.
- The struggle for independence the tragic saga of partition of India and Pakistan and traumatic experiences of mass exodus and violence find expression in literatures of Indian and Pakistani diasporic writers frequently.
- In Sri Lankan literature, the ethnic violence between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and sufferings of the victims has found heart rending expression.

- Much of these writings focus on the issue of identity often juxtaposing the individual and the collective, the local and the foreign, private and public.
- Religion and politics form an important focal point of discussion in many diasporic works. It is quite often rewriting of history from altogether a new angle.
- Most of the diasporic writers are secular and take broad minded humanist view of religion and culture and yet they look back on their past and traditions in a nostalgic way.
- Many diasporic women writers have given emotive expressions to feminist issues in socio-political construction of the nation.
- The act of writing for the diasporic writers is an act of reclaiming their home land, forgotten traditions and quite often the lost language.
- The narratives of these diasporic writers are varied and realistic like their themes and settings. Geographical boundaries stretch across India, Pakistan, England, and USA and so on. The geographical territories are blurred on account of movement of the character's psyche back and forth.
- Most of the Indian diasporic writers laid from different states, different background, different religion, and have settled in the countries like the USA, England, Canada, Germany and other European countries in different milieu but they meet on the common ground of migrant mind and diasporic destiny.

The major Indian diasporic writers, to name a few prominent are V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Vikram Sheth, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parmeshwaran, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Apachana and so on. Women writers among the diaspora are quite remarkable who have carved niche for themselves. The major women writers of South Asian diaspora are Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Shashi Deshpande, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Yasmine

Gvonratne, Jean Arsanayagam, Sunita Namjoshi, Bapsi Sidhwa, Shauna Baldwin, Meera Syal, Uma Parmeshwaran etc.

Diasporic writers have explored various literary genres of literature, fiction, poetry, memories, fictional narratives, non-fiction narratives etc. Fictions being the most dominant form of literature, practiced by them, the diasporic writers have earned reputation as fiction writers. There are excellent short story-writers among the Indian diaspora writers. In comparison to fiction and prose, diasporic poetry lacks the richness and variety. However, there are some powerful diasporic women poets like Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others whose poetry exhibits sincerity of feelings and expressions and also poetic maturity.

In the dissertation, the first chapter deals with the term diaspora in general and then briefly explained its types, characteristics and its relationship with other disciplines like sociology, history, political science and so on. The focus of the research is on Diaspora as a literary term. In the end of the first chapter and the entire second chapter, major diasporic writers, including some regional literary writers mainly Gujarati, are discussed as Gujarati is my mother tongue. The dissertation focuses on the study of five women poets Meena Alexander, Sujat Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam.

Poetry, as everyone has to acknowledge, is the highest, the subtlest form of human utterance. Its language is metaphorical and much of its meaning lies between the lines. It contains layers of meanings that need to be explored with utmost care and understanding. It often abounds in images, symbols, mythological allusions and subtle figures of speech. A careful study with deep sensitivity unfolds its meaning with its layers. Poetry was a special kind of language that transcends the limitations of the language per se. The process of merging, overlapping, intermingling and entwining is the characteristic of poetry. To be a poet or living as a poet itself is to live a sort of alienated life. Therefore a native or non-native poet is an outsider. A

Great Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva said, "All poets are Yids (Jews)" The poets are eternal misfits, even outcasts in the mainstream of cultural establishment.

An immigrant poet is not a poet of exile but rather a poet of alienation or not belonging. Alienation implies nostalgia for past or future and the poetry is always related to "felt time" (past or future). Man is not the master of the language but it is the language that dominates man and man surrenders to its strange contrivances. This 'strangeness' is not incidental; it reflects the destiny of a poet who is always 'a stranger at home'. Poetry is the act of defiance against the incommunicability of being. Joseph Brodsky once wrote that literature in the first place as the translation of a metaphysical truth into any given vernacular, on a subconscious level or on the universal grammar. Poetry is the form of art that remains the most unrevealed.

What Meena Alexander says about a lyric poem is highly relevant:

"It seems to me that lyric poem is a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world. To make a lyric poem, I have to enter into a dream state. But at the same time, almost by virtue of that disconnect, it becomes a very intensive location to reflect the world." ³

In our age when science and technology rule the world, many people think that it is irrelevant as Science and spirituality are not antagonistic; poetry and science are not against each other. Poetry is a higher Science. In ancient times, Science was considered a part of philosophy and poetry is a profound philosophy. Sigmund Freud admitted that the unconscious had long been discovered by the poets before he did. William Wordsworth had declared that poetry is the impassioned expression of all sciences. It is the loftiest form of literature and the supreme utterance of mankind. Mathew Arnold predicted the brightest future for poetry. He called it the future religion. True poetry rises above the clamor of the chaos, violence and trivialities of life. The poets are liberators they are free and make others

free. The basic concern of poets is man because man is the Supreme Being among all creatures.

The study of poetry is chosen because it is observed generally that poetry needs to be given its rightful place in our research and studies. As poetry is open to multiple meanings, it is an interesting job to study and analyze poetry and my research work has enlightening task. In the dissertation, I undertook the study of five diaspora women poets: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam. All these women poets belong to South Asian region: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are Indians who have settled abroad. Meena Alexander and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have lived in the USA while Sujata Bhatt lives in Germany. All of them have travelled widely across Europe and USA. Meena Alexander belongs to Kerala, Sujata Bhatt is from Gujarat and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni hails from Bengal. Moniza Alvi is born in Pakistan but she has lived in England since she was only a few months old. Jean Arsanayagam is a unique case of a diaspora. She is a Dutch Burgher women poet married to a Tamil. She has undergone the most agonizing experience of being alienated and exiled.

These women poets are called 'Cassandra in Exile' in the title of the dissertation, because like Cassandra, they are condemned to speak out but often not listened to or believed. The myth of Cassandra is quite well-known in Greek literature. It is one of the saddest tales of ancient classical literature. Cassandra was the princess of Troy; the daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba. She was so charming that gods and mortals both were charmed by her beauty. Apollo, the Sun God lusted after her and to win her, promised to bestow upon her the gift of prophecy. She received the gift but refused to give herself to Apollo. Furious at her refusal, Apollo decided to punish her. He could not take back the gift from her but altered it. He leveled a curse upon her that she would be able to see the future but no one would believe her when she predicted. On the contrary, they would call her a liar. The cruelty lay in the fact that she could foresee the future but no one believed her when she warned them of impending disasters. Even her father

pronounced her insane and she was locked inside her chamber. Cassandra predicted the fall of Troy at the hands of Greeks and also warned her people about the Trojan horse in which the Greeks hid themselves to enter the city of Troy.

After the fall of Troy, Cassandra accompanied Agamemnon as his concubine. Upon their return, Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra killed both her husband and Cassandra. Cassandra foresaw her own death at the hands of Clytemnestra but could not stop it. To my mind, Cassandra represents the fate of women in patriarchal society. She also symbolizes the impassioned outbursts by the woman who is unable to bear the burden and agony of her gift of prophetic speech. Poetic speech and prophetic speech are synonymous. Cassandra's knowledge is apocalyptic and poetry afflicts her settings her off from other people. This suggests that poetry from its unknown hidden source creates speech which profoundly 'other' or 'opposed' to the accepted values and notions of the society. Cassandra thus symbolizes the denigration of the hierarchy of traditional authority and her role is to create the poem as prophecy. The society tries to paralyze its female poets who through the intensity of their language create songs like screams. Cassandra's screams are the screams of a woman and poet who can see impending tragedy and try to warn humanity but the tragic irony is that no one needs them. In fact, all poets are destined to be Cassandras whether they are men or women. Ved Vyas, the author of the Mahabharata bemoaned the fate of poet when he said that he had been crying out loudly raising his hands but people did not listen to him.

The five women poets discussed the dissertation are prophetic in the sense that they cry out against the evils of terrorism, racialism, war, ethnic violence, egotism and patriarchal hegemony. Like Cassandra, they say 'no' to easy complacency of our age. They speak out fearlessly and unabashedly. These diasporic women poets have been displaced from their Troy, their homeland and undergo the agonies of exile and the loss of their mother tongue. Like Cassandra, they denigrate the hierarchy of traditional authority, the stereotype values, political and cultural subordination. These

diasporic women oppose false cultural pretensions of their own countries as well as the countries of their domicile. Like Cassandra, they represent women and poets who voice the universal and eternal sufferings of the suppressed, the alienated, the displaced and the marginalized. I would reiterate that in reality, all poets are Cassandra's but these five diasporic women poets represents Cassandra more as they are women; they are exiled from their home lands and they are poets who like all poets born to speak out against the evils of their contemporary society.

Meena Alexander (1951-) is a genuine diasporic voice that expresses her own lived diasporic experiences in her poetry, uprooting and exile, migrant memories, displacement and search for identity in an alien land. Meena Alexander was christened Mary Elizabeth but she officially changed her name to Meena when she was fifteen. By changing name, she felt that she stripped free of the colonial burden. This very act of changing the name indicates her independent, rebellious spirit. Meena went to Sudan with her parents where her father worked with the Sudanese Government. She spent her childhood years and the days of adolescence between five to eighteen there. From Khartoum University, she moved to England where she got her doctorate from Nottingham University. She returned to India, worked in CIEFL Hyderabad where she met David Lelyveld whom she married and moved to New York. She has lived in New York with her husband and her children- a son and a daughter. Her husband is a Jewish scholar of the history of India and South Asia.

Meena Alexander started to write poetry at the age of ten and her major works include: *The Bird's Bright Wing* (1976), *Without Place* (1978), *I root My name* (1977), *Stone Roots* (1980), *The Night Scene, the Garden* (1989) *River and Bridge* (1997) *Manhattan Music* (A novel) (1997), *The Nampally Road* (A novel) (1991), and her memoir *Fault Lines* (1993 & 2003). Her latest works include: *Illiterate Heart* (2002) and *Raw Silk* (2004). The major characteristics of Meena Alexander's works are as follows:

(1) Most of her writings explore the theme of migrancy, displacement, exile, multiple identities and allegiances. These themes appear in her early works *The Birds Bright Wings* (1976), *Without Place* (1978) and *Stone Roots* (1980). These themes continue to reappear in her subsequent works also. As the titles of many of her books suggest, her major preoccupation is the search for roots through evocation of local landscapes, events, family members and family events.

(2) In her later collections, she deals with the issues of defining a strong female self especially through matrilineal memories. Her grandfather Ilya, her grandmother and their house in Tiruvilla dominate her memories. Ilya was an intellectual, social worker quite close to E.M.S. Nambudripad, the well known political leader of Kerala. Her grandmother Kunju was a very powerful woman who adored Gandhian values. She worked for women's liberations through education. Meena Alexander reminisces about her.

“I imaged her: a sensitive, cultural woman;
A woman who had a tradition, and a history-
precisely what I lacked; a woman who had
lived to witness the birth pangs of a nation”.⁴

Meena Alexander expresses her sorrow and sense of emptiness at being a woman without a tradition and history on account of her immigrant life.

(3) Meena Alexander's poems abound in personal memories of her childhood, her grandparents, their house in Tiruvella and the landscapes of Kerala. Her memoir throws an ample light on her mental makeup and shaping of her sensibilities. It helps the readers in understanding her poetry better, which are marked by the sense of loss, the pangs of exile, and dislocation. *A House of a Thousand Doors* (1988) is a collection of poetry mixed with imaginary letters to her grandmother and mother and short lyrical prose pieces.

(4) Meena Alexander's poetry is intensely personal as well as political. In her poem *Art of Pariahs* from *River and Bridge* (1996) she deals with issue of racial tension in the USA.

“Back in the kitchen stove
Draupadi sings:
In my head Beirut still burns

The queen of Nubia, of God’s upper kingdom
The Rani of Jhansi, transfigured, raising her sword
are players too. They have entered with me
Into North America and share these walls.”⁵

Here she refers to injustice to women and racial discrimination in the USA. She deals with the themes of ethnic intolerance, terrorism, fanaticism and interracial tensions.

(5) Meera Alexander’s poetry is intensely lyrical, poignant and sensual. With a few strokes of a pen, she evokes layers of meaning. As a poet, she is very conscious and confident about the role of poetry. She says:

“In a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some way to reconcile as to our world
And allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist.”⁶

Alexander believes that poetry is a powerful force to tackle global violence. She believes that poetry, particularly a lyric poem is a form of extreme silence protected from the world. She recollects the famous Gujarati poet Umashankar Joshi’s faith in poetry. In a poem *Paper Filled with Light*, she says that poetry is an illumination. In spite of violence and terror that prevails in the world, one must never lose faith in human goodness and virtues.

(6) Meena Alexander has undergone multiple identities in multiple places as she has been travelling and living in different countries: India, Sudan, USA and different cities and towns: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozhencheri, Pune, Khartoum, London, New York, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Trivendrum etc. In *Fault Lines*, she asks herself: Who am I? Where am I? When am I? These are the questions that all diasporic writers need to ask amidst violent

densities of place. In modern times, the worlds overlap and therefore one has to co-exist in fluid diasporic world she says:

“What does it mean to carry one’s house
On one’s back?”⁸

In the USA, Meena Alexander experiences racial discrimination where she has to explain her origin, her occupation all the time. As a poet, she has to be put into a category of Asian-American poet or American poet or South Asian immigrant poet but all these labels are hyphenated and incomplete. She calls herself a woman poet of color, a South Indian woman poet who makes up her lines in English, a post colonial language. She says that Frantz Fanon speaks of the barbed wire that exists in a colonized state. She believes very strongly that zone of occult instability must be expressed in the poetry of diasporic poets. The Asian Americans have to grapple with subtle violence and injustice and the expression of these experiences will help in the process of decolonization.

(7) Meena Alexander says that people call poets “the creatures of that small despised art”. As a poet, she returns to her past memories again and again. She feels that ethnicity demands the recollection of past, homeland and one’s traditions: In India, there are varied patterns of hierarchy, authority and traditions. However, unlike Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, she finds nothing much damaging in them. In fact, to her mind, the post-colonial heritage has subverted many good things that India could boast of. She says that the freedom that America claims to provide to her people is worse than a lie. It damages imagination beyond repair. In America, she came face to face with the subtlest forms of racism and violence. She feels that her ethnicity as an Indian American or Asian American requires her to hold on to past resisting fracturing. This is where poetry helps her to transcend individualism and restore human dignity.

(8) Diasporic women poets face double burden of diasporic destiny. They face hostile racialism and displacements in alien countries and at the same time also suffer at the hands of patriarchal society. In addition to these, women poets also face the borders that their bodies create racial as well as

sexual borders. She was taught by her mother and the environment around her about the limitations imposed on women by their bodies. Arranged marriage was a narrow gate that all Indian women had to enter and learn certain skills to run a household. Meena had heard that girls were molested in public places and quite often they committed suicide to do away with their shameful bodies. Meena Alexander is haunted by these terrible memories. In her poem *Passion* she describes the life of woman who gives birth to another life but for her, there are no bronze, no summoning". Not even the words of sympathy and love. Meena Alexander does not blame the traditions for the sufferings of women like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, but blames the body of the women. A woman is "smeared with ash from black god's altar", and she is "tongue less in rhapsody".⁷

(9) Meena Alexander portrays the pain of crossing borders and the ruin of our language and sense of having "no home". She writes in the poem titled *Muse*.

"Our language is in ruins
Vowels impossibly sharp
Broken consonants of bone
She has no home."⁹

In another poem titled *Muse (2)*, she says that diasporic poets are creatures of Here and There who keep scurrying from one place to another with no fixed home. Words, sentences, maps burn her skin. Meena Alexander has also written poem about the burden of English and illiteracy in one's own tongue. She realized that colonialism was quite intrinsic to the burden of English in India. She feels robbed of something intimate and intrinsic. In her poem, *Night scene the Garden* she talks of "ferocious alphabets of flesh", and her back against barbed wire". At the end of the poem, she summons "ferocious alphabets of flesh".

"Come, ferocious alphabets of flesh
Splinter and raze my page

That out of the dumb
And bleeding part of me,
I claim my heritage.”¹⁰

Meena Alexander's poetry expresses the narrator's search for identity amidst a world that labels and identifies people by race, color, religion or ethnic group. In a poem *Brown Skin, white Mark?* she describes a free make-over in America to turn herself into “a hyphenated thing” with Paul's shoes, makeover at Macy's eye shine and lip shine. In the U.S.A. Asian women prefer to be of ‘no color’, larks with no sound. Meena Alexander deals with the theme of intolerance, violence and fundamentalism anywhere in the world. *The young of Tiananmen* eulogizes the sacrifices of the young men and women in China to end bloody communist regime. She has written two poems about Safdar Hashmi who was beaten to death on January 1, 1989 while performing a play titled *Hallabul* in support of striking workers. Two days after his death his wife Moloysree returned to the spot and performed the play. Meena Alexander pays a rich tribute to Safdar, a dedicated Marxist playwright and to his brave wife.

(10) Meena Alexander gives voice to her protest against the tyranny of patriarchy and colonialism. Compulsory acquisition of colonial language splits the subject's body and her sense of self. In her collection *Illiterate Heart* (2002), she deals with the theme how identities are shaped by languages and how they merge with and inscribe female bodies. However, by using languages and writing poetry on them, she is able to bind body and self into a unified whole. In a poem *An Honest Sentence*, she turns to the Greek myth of Agamemnon and Iphigenia. Iphigenia, the poet and woman merge and emerge as an injured voiceless sacrificial lamb of human history – the female. In Meena Alexander's poetry, woman is brought back to life again and again.

(11) The events of 9/11 and the aftermath made indelible impact on the minds of the immigrants in the USA. Indians, Pakistani's and South Asians were targeted and taken as terrorists. It was a hellish experience for many Asian diaspora. Even Meena was cautioned by a friend that she could be

taken for an Arab. In her collection *Raw Silk* (2004), the three poems titled *Aftermath*, *Invisible City* and *Pit fire* deal with the trauma after 9/11. There are also poems that deal ethnic violence in Gujarat in September 2002. The collection is an attempt to negotiate a dual trauma both for the poet herself and her subjects. These experiences of violence, war and terrorism were a palimpsest, as she had heard of the violence of partition from her grandparents and parents. Then she had witnessed the genocides civil war in Sudan where she had spent her adolescence period. Later, she had witnessed emergency, the assassination Mrs. Indira Gandhi and massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, terrorist attacks on Twin towers and Hindu-Muslim riot in Gujarat. In *The Pit fire*, she proclaims:

“In altered light I hear a bird cry
by the pit, for of metal, strut of death.”¹¹

(12) Meena Alexander is a great admirer of Gandhiji and Gandhian values. The title poem *Raw Silk* refers to bonfire ordained by Mahatma Gandhi and in a poem *Rumors for an Immigrant*. She describes Gandhi in Central Park with “Smoke in his palms, raising his charkha, fluttering out of his dhoti”. The rumor is soon afloat that

“There is no homeland anymore
All nations are abolished, a young man cries.”¹²

Petro Glyph is based on Kant’s notion of geography where all borders are erased. It is a long poem in eight parts that diffuses the diasporic tension by saying:

‘Home is where I go, they let me in’¹³

She says that art of fire and rain, a new word with unity and brotherhood would emerge. Poets are always the torch bearers of love and peace and Meena Alexander also gives out the final message of love, brotherhood, humanity and peace.

(13) Meena Alexander's poetry exhibits intense diasporic sensibility as she calls other places 'Fragile places' and she returns to her homeland through nostalgia and memory again and again. Her poetry also exhibits a strong link with matrilineage. There is also a feminist thrust in some of her poems. The narrator in the poem *Blood Line* speaks about continuity and change, the old generation and the new generation and how the narrator acts as a bridge. She had dedicated the poem to her daughter Swati Mariam and traces three generations of women.

"She is my mother's
Mother who cries in me
My line of blood
Our perpetuity"

(14) Gender, religion and racial discrimination are the forces that have created wars and violence. It is usually men who have perpetrated wars and violence. Women have acted as the guardians of lineage transcending race, gender, caste and religion. Despite soul-crushing patriarchy and subjugation, women have never given up hope for love, faith, harmony and happiness. In despair, the poet must think that "the point is to live" and the very act of writing is intrinsic to the act of living. Meena Alexander calls poetry "the music of survival". She says that a woman has to cross several borders, body being the first and when the crust of self hardens, poetry comes into existence. Migrant memories have given birth to her poetry which permits a dwelling at the edge of the world.

Meena Alexander is a woman poet with intensely confessional, self-analytical tone. She is utterly sensitive to violence, exploitation and dehumanization and cries out against them with Cassandra-like scream. There is a sad undercurrent in her poetry but also an optimistic note for future without war and violence. She is a genuine diasporic poet as she experiences the crisis of identity and alienation in alien lands and returns to her husband, her roots through nostalgia and memories.

Sujata Bhatt, like Meera Alexander, is a remarkable diasporic poet who lived in India, the USA and Europe. She was born in Ahmedabad in 1956 and graduated from the writer's workshop, University of IOWA. At present, she lives with her husband and a daughter in Germany. She has worked in the USA and Canada. She was a visiting writer at the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

The remarkable characteristics of her poetry as follows:

(1) Her poetry exhibits her contemporarity through her writing about time, culture and history and their impact on her identity. Like all diasporic poets, she too feels the pain of displacement but she does not exhibit it openly. A sense of continuity in terms of her relationship with home pervades through her poetry. Though she is away from home, she feels that she carries it with her all the time. Though her concerns are global, she shuttles back to local, native experiences. To her Home is not a mere geographical entity' it is the part and parcel of her inner being. She says:

“But I never left home
I carried it away
with me here in my darkness
in myself.”

Home remains central to her consciousness. When she writes about the Hindu-Sikh riots in Delhi, she remembers how she used to play with a Sikh boy in her childhood. She recalls the people, family members, places and fun and festivals of India and Gujarat in particular. She often refers to legends, anecdotes and family rituals that have been stored in her memory.

(2) For Sujata Bhatt, history is a broken narrative that entails displacement, dislocation and alienation. In her poem *History is a Broken Narrative*, she says:

“History is broken narrative
Pick a story and see where
It will lead you
You take your language where you get it

Or do you
Get your language where you take it?"

At the end of her poem, she frames an equation between history's broken narrative and the narrative of the diasporic self. She says that a diasporic self makes a language when he/she changes it.

(3) Sujata Bhatt evokes images of home and the country through birds, animals and insect like peacock, lizard, monkeys, crocodile etc. She is fascinated by the monkey in particular who represents not just an animal but Lord Hanuman, the monkey god. When a monkey child and human child stare at each other, innocence stares at innocence, and there is purity, clarity and transparency in this stare. Neither the human child nor the monkey child knows fear. For a human child, the word is the thing itself but for a monkey child, a thing is a thing without a name. The poem *Stare* achieves a philosophical dimension children treat monkeys in a friendly manner for whom trees are barren without them. The memories of childhood days in Ahmedabad (Maninagar) give her a sense of being at home whenever she goes.

Sujata Bhatt also evokes the past and the sense of home recalling personalities like Swami Anand, Nanabhai Bhatt, Deviben Pathak and her grandmother. She also refers to ancient Indian mythological figures like Lord Hanuman, Goddess Kalika, Nachiketa and so on. The diasporic writers' sense of identity is ascertained and strengthened through the images of past and history of his/her country.

(4) A Sujata Bhatt poem *A Memory from Marathi, Honey moon and My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari* expresses her preoccupation with her childhood. The identity of a diaspora is constantly in flux, changing colors always slipping out one's grasp and yet refusing to go away. Sujata's multicultural perspectives on language, literature, art and culture arise from her own multicultural experiences. Born in Gujarat, her mother tongue is Gujarati, studied in England and USA, worked in Canada and USA and now lives in Germany; it is natural that she has a multicultural upbringing and exposure. She is acquainted with various forms of arts—painting, sculpture,

music and literature etc. Her poetry is often deeply meditative and philosophical. Her poetry is often deals with Indian landscape and moves towards Europe and America but India remains in her memory as fresh as ever, providing to her the sense of home in alien lands.

(5) In many of her poems, language or languages pose a major concern. She spoke Gujarati, and then she studied at Pune where she learnt Marathi and Hindi but soon English came to her replacing the languages of her country and her people. She refers to the colonial nature of language when she says:

“Which language has not been the oppressor’s
Tongue?
Which language
truly meant to murder someone?

However the very language of the oppressor becomes the language of the oppressed. In history, there have been examples where the language of the colonizer becomes the language of liberation from the tyranny of the colonizer for the colonized. The example of English in India can be cited to illustrate the point.

Her poem *Search for My Tongue* is a fine example of a diasporic sensibility that undergoes pain and conflict when one has to lay aside one’s mother tongue and use a foreign language. She asks:

“I ask you what you would do
If you had two tongues in your mouth,
And lost the first one, the mother tongue
And could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.”¹⁵

The poem expresses the fear that she was losing her identity as a Gujarati speaking Indian. She feels that she was being Americanized and her mother tongue would not and die in her mouth. Then she dreams that her mother tongue reasserts itself as her first language. The language of

her hopes and dreams remains Gujarati. The poet is proud of the fact that her cultural identity has not been lost as she feared. She feels reconciled when she realizes that one's mother tongue would blossom out of one's mouth anytime pushing other language aside. The initial fear of losing the language is finally replaced by the confident reassertion of the mother tongue strengthening the identity of the poet. This poem is an assertion that the diaspora need not fear the loss of their mother tongue.

(6) In Sujata Bhatt's poetry, we find intense longing, nostalgia and lust for life. *The Dream* is a poem about childhood memory. Her father tells her

“Don't resist
You must accept it
There is no point
In fighting with the snake”¹⁶

Snake symbolizes eros, desire, longing, fear or uncertainty. As a diasporic poem, it tells the readers that in a multicultural world, it is unnecessary to fight with the colorful otherness. It has to be accepted as a fact. The title poem *Augatora* suggests an eye-gate, a hole for eye to measure the sun and light. As a diasporic poem, it cautions that one must not lose one's identity. Child and house symbolize one's identity. She says:

“Keep an eye on the house
Keep an eye on the child
Don't let the child fall out of the window
Don't throw your house out of the window.”¹⁷

(7) Sujata Bhatt refers to international political leaders and events in her poems. She refers to Partition, pope, Tito, the WHO, the earthquake, Jerusalem, Red army and so on. *Partition* describes the horrible experience of partition of India in 1947 by the poet's mother who was nineteen years old then; she could hear the cries of people stranded at Ahmedabad railway station. Her father's sister went to the railway station with food and water for those stranded people. The poet recalls that she stood in the garden listening to those cries of pain and fear. The poet's mother tells her that she

wished that she had gone with her aunt. The poet in this poem when Indian independence turned fifty year old recalls her mother's remorse and guilt at the lack of courage. The poet's mother also remarks that it was cruel that a man who knew nothing about the history of the country divided India. Sujata Bhatt refers to historical events not in larger context but in the context of her personal memory.

(8) Sujata Bhatt is not a fiery, staunch feminist like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. However, in some of the poems, she deals with the sufferings of women in patriarchal set up of society. *Voice of the Unwanted Girl* is moving poem about a girl who had been done away with before her birth. The dead girl addresses her mother and asks her to look for her in the place where she had sent her, the place unspeakable and indescribable. *Kalika* is a poem that deals with the theme of loss because of the death of the protagonist's mother and the continuity of matrilineage through mother's nurturance.

(9) Sujata Bhatt as diasporic poet stands for assimilation and acceptance. She thinks that human history is a broken narrative with phases of fragmentation, assimilation and renewal. Her diasporic entity is marked by tolerance, acceptance of multiculturalism, assimilation and reconciliation. 'Multicultural Poem' is a manifesto of multiculturalism and multicultural poetry. Multicultural poem cannot be tamed; it cannot be anyone's pet. It has to be read at the border. It escapes understanding. Inclusiveness and assimilation is the intrinsic elements of multiculturalism.

(10) Sujata Bhatt is the granddaughter of Shri Nanabhai Bhatt, an eminent Gandhian educationist who set up Lok Bharati, Sanosara near Bhavnagar. Nanabhai was a freedom fighter, social worker and educationist who advocated Gandhian model of education viz rural-based education focusing on cultivation of head, heart and hands (three H's). Sujata remembers Nanabhai's commitment to eradication of untouchability and how her grandmother, an orthodox woman changed her mind about untouchability when Nanabhai decided to sleep in the garden. She gave up her deeply ingrained views regarding pollution through touch for the sake of her husband. The poet says that she has inherited her grandmother's crescent eyebrows and impatience to understand.

Sujata also recalls Nanabhai in Prison in 1942-43 reading Tennyson, his favorite poet. She wonders which lines of Tennyson comforted him in that dark cell. Some of the poems of Sujata Bhatt express her admiration and adulation for her grandmother, grandfather and mother.

(11) In many of her poems, Sujata Bhatt refers to Indian mythology, like that of Ganesha or Hanuman. In her poem *What happened to the Elephant* refers to the famous mythological tale of Ganesha whose human head Shiva chopped off and replaced it with an elephant head. *A Different Way to Dance* describes a drive south of Boston on a hot June night when her mother saw an elephant in a truck. They follow the truck as if they were following Lord Ganesha himself. The poet imagines Parvati, Ganesha's mother dreaming of her son's greenish brown eyes, small nose, and curly hair and so on. Sujata says that the elephant head of Ganesha still cherishes the memories of the forest life. She evokes a fine sensuous picture with the images that appeal to senses of touch, hearing, smell, sight and so on. Her use of Indian myth strengthens her diasporic stance. Sujata looks at these myths raising highly sensitive and intellectual inquiries. For Sujata, tails of monkeys suggest glorious question. She mixes history, mythology and politics in a very poignant manner.

(12) As a diasporic poet, Sujata always insists on embracing universalism and inclusiveness. Her poem *Distances* expresses her diasporic and multicultural sentiment suggesting that the whole world is one, the world beyond borders and walls. While swimming in the Atlantic Ocean at Conil, she feels that all places are closer to her. She can touch Africa, America and other countries through the waves simultaneously and all places slide through her fingers "with the frothy, breaking waves with salty water". Out of the ocean, in land; all is separate and distant where man-made borders come into existence. It is not the land but the ocean that represents true multicultural world.

(13) Sujata Bhatt's poetry exhibits her wider perspectives and empathy across cultures. She has deep understanding of painting, sculpture and literature of other countries. *A Color for Solitude* (2002) shows her profound

understanding of the painter's inner and outer world. Sujata recaptures the beauty of German landscapes, weather and the music of other languages. The poems in *A Color for Solitude* explores into Paul Modersohn Becker's (1876-1907) beautiful and deeply sensitive paintings. She died at a very young age after giving birth to a daughter. She left behind her remarkable body of paintings that made her earn the place as one of the greatest modern painters of her time. She was a friend of Rilke, the famous German poet and his wife Clara, a reputed sculptor.

Sujata differs from other diasporic poets under this study in that she is sensitive and a critic with an eye of a scientist. Her poetry has instinctive sophistication that confronts the contradiction in the world of Science and mythology. She appreciates modern German poetry, paintings and sculpture, besides other European arts. She is sensitive, romantic and sometimes erotic poet with scientific attitude, wry, wise and searching questioning stance. Her poetry is motivated by the sense of questioning, analysis and shifting attitude towards the process of immigrant life and history. Despite her longing and love for India, she is well aware of its poverty, squalor and superstitions. However, she is not critical and sardonic as analytical and objective in her attitude and treatment of evils that India is infested with. She is also an admirer of strength and endeavor of Indian people, women in particular.

(14) Mother and mother hood emerge as the key thematic issues for diaspora in search of their identity. An identification with Indian matrilineal practices-nurturing, devotion and sacrifice sure psychological function for diasporic women writers for the purpose of rooting in their country. An Indian woman always believes that it is motherhood that confers upon her a purpose and identity. In *Brunizem* Sujata Bhatt speak of women sources of narrativisation, knowledge and creators of myths. The women personas in Sujata Bhatt's poetry is strong willed independent and intelligent who question male-centered world. Location is often synonymous with mother centeredness. In a poem *Garlic of Truth*, the kitchen is shown as the world of women where ingredients like mustard and garlic are used as motherly

medicines. Her mother who put garlic all into her ears gave her 'dreamy truth' and truthful dreams'.

Though Sujata Bhatt never claims to be a crusader for women's rights, she believes that a new woman is an agent of new social reality.

"The tall woman walks alone
Deeper into the woods
Among a crowd of trees
She finds her place
And looks at the moon
As if it were her little sister
Finally come home."

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, has been acclaimed as a fiction writer but she had started her literary career as a poet earlier and won several prizes for poetry. She was born in Calcutta and moved to the USA where she got her Ph.D in English. She has been deeply involved in issues involving women. She heads an NGO called MAITRI that provides counseling and shelter to battered women. Her major works are: *Black Candle*, *Leaving Yuba City*, *The Reason for Masturtiums* (collection of poems) and works of fiction that include: *Arranged Marriage* (short stories) *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of my Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams*, *The Palace of Illusions*. She is a bold feminist who fights against victimization of women. *Black Candle* as a collection of poem chronicling the searched lives of women particularly an India.

The characteristics of her works as a diasporic poet are as follows:

(1) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that as a diasporic poet, she enjoys certain amount of freedom which she would not have been able to enjoy, had she lived in India. She feels that her coming to the USA gave her the distance she needed to look back on her culture objectively to pick out what she valued and what she did not agree with. One of these was the double standards in effect in many areas for women. She also saw that many

Indian women around her were still caught in the old value system that a man has a power and precedence over them. She came across several women in the USA belonging to South Asia during 1989-90 who were victims of abuse.

They were doubly victimized by the fact that they were unfamiliar with the workings of American Society and had no one to turn to. They were uncomfortable with the idea of taking family problems to strangers- whites especially. This made them more vulnerable. Chitra started a group called MAITRI that started helping women in distress. Her poetry exhibits her staunch feminist stance in most of her works.

(2) *Black Candle* is a collection of poems about women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The book is traversed by women in Pardah, women married against their wishes in arranged marriage, childless women suffering at the hands of her husband and in-laws, outcast widows, women whose fetuses are aborted, women burnt for dowries, women beaten by husbands, Muslim women whose husbands marry second wives, Hindu women burnt at their husbands' funeral pyres, living goddesses forced to live secluded, virgin lives. Divakaruni exposes the oppression to which patriarchal hegemony subjects them.

(3) In Divakaruni's poetry, frequently innocent looking exterior landscapes turns ominous and dreadful. Seemingly innocent and disparate landscapes like the monsoon in fields of Bengal, the ocean beaches of Maui, a mother's kitchen in the US, heady fragrance of Indian cooking or a haunting train journey transforms the known into the unknown and the reader is drawn into the inner landscape of South Asian women.

(4) Chitra's voice is unique different and quite out spoken among all these diasporic women poets. She brings into her poems a wider variety of experiences, bicultural perspectives and a depth of feelings and perception which make the world of South Asian women accessible to readers in a highly poignant manner.

(5) Chitra's poetry reflects the depth and complexities of the contradictory world of the immigrant women. She portrays joys, the customs, the rituals of

women's lives in South Asia, the stuff of which women's lives are made up of, and above the sufferings visited upon them by patriarchal dominance. Chitra's voice is so genuine and poignant that her poetry is immediately recognizable by all women. Divakaruni is highly sensuous, pictorial and poignant. It is unabashedly human, feminist and women-centered.

(6) Divakaruni's poetry bears a witness to the conditions of women and also to the conditions of the world. The world that she depicts is rich in sounds, colors, scents with fabrics, spices, flowers and water. It is the world that afflicts rather than it exhilarates.

(7) Divakaruni is particularly interested in how different form of art influence and inspire each other. There are a series of poems based on paintings of Franscesco clement, photographs of Raghubir Singh and Indian films. Like her other poems, these also focus on experiences of women and their struggle to find identities for themselves. Her poems have the magic and universal appeal. As a diasporic poet, her concern is primarily with women in South Asian women. From her experiences of the USA and American way of life, she feels that women in the USA and the west have certain advantages over the South Asian women in general.

(8) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *Leaving Yuba City* narrates the emotional trauma of the first immigrant formers who came from Punjab to Yuba City in 1910. Immigrant restrictions prevented their wives and families from joining their men. They had to live unnatural lives with unquenched longing for their husbands and their husbands yearning to be united with them. *Brides of Yuba City* empathies with the cultural shock faced by the innocent women. They had to undertake a long arduous journey to the USA in a ship travelling for the whole blurred month with the acrid smell of vomit. Many of them had never seen their husbands as they were married to their photographs. Chitra writes the tragic fate of sixteen year old Harvinder married to a man of 52. The narrator says:

“He is fifty-two
She sixteen, tonight like us all-
She will open her legs to him.”¹⁸

Chitra Banerjee's focus in this collection is on narrating the neglected lives of women from the perspectives of women. *At the Sati temple, Bikaner* depicts ugly practice of Sati in Rajasthan. Though the practice has been outlawed in the 19th century, it still continues, as in the case of Roop Kanwar in 1987. The Sati temples extol the virtues of the burned wives. In the poem *Leaving Yuba City*, the girl Sushma leaves her home for the USA, snaps ties with her family, state and country for freedom and modern ways of life. She has shed patriarchal prescriptions and imposed taboos but she knows that when she would call them from Las Vegas or Los Angeles, words would come to her, halting but clear in the language of her parents.

(9) Chitra's poetry is mother-centered and portrays the strength of women of the third generation. The first generation women suffered the bondage imposed by patriarchy but they, through their strategic moves, paved way for their daughters' freer and happier lives. Banerjee's poetry also highlights the matrilineal past in which the daughter's identity takes birth. Mother aids and abets her daughter's liberation through literacy, creative work like cooking, house-keeping, embroidery, gardening and her endurance and self-confidence.

(10) Chitra Banerjee Divakarunis' differs from other women poets in this study in her attitude towards homeland. She too, like other diasporic women poets, recalls India, Indian traditions and landscapes but she does see very little good in India and her traditions. She stands for liberation of women from crushing patriarchy that Indian society does not allow while the western society, particularly, the American way of life does. This does not mean that she does not feel nostalgic for homeland but her feminist crusade overshadows the diasporic sense of uprooting and dislocation caused by migration and racial bias. For her, dislocation of woman is routed in the patriarchal system which does not allow woman to shape and mould her individual identity.

Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore in Pakistan in 1954. Her father is from Pakistan and her mother in English. They went back to Pakistan but eventually returned to England when she was a few months old to Hatfield in

Hertfordshire. She never learnt her father's language and growing up; she felt her origins were invisible.

She was never truly attached to her father's country, her father's language or his religion. She even did not feel at home in England. She was not the part of Asian community at all. She felt it odd when she was sometimes labeled as a black writer. She thought that England is a country of mixed races and mixed cultures. However, she always felt that it is important to know from where one comes and what has gone into one's making.

Moniza Alvi's major poetical works include: *The country at my shoulder* (1933), *A Bowl of Warm Air* (1996) *Carrying My Wife* (2000) *Souls* (2002), *How the Stone Found its Voice*, *Europa and Split world: Poems 1990-2005*. As a diasporic poet her poetry is characterized by following traits:

(1) Many of Moniza Alvi's poems are autobiographical. The poem *Presents from my Aunts* was one of her earliest poems. The girl in the poem is around thirteen. She has received gifts of clothes and jewellery from her aunts in Pakistan. The clothes seem to stick to her in an uncomfortable way, like a false skin. She is fascinated by the colors and beauty of these clothes and jewellery but at the same time, she feels more comfortable in denim and corduroy. She then contrasts the beautiful clothes and jewellery of India with boring, dull English cardigans from Marks and Spencer. She also tries to remember what it was like for her family to travel to England. Her knowledge of her birth place comes to her only through old photographs and newspaper reports. She could not connect with her birthplace and childhood. Her poems present over riding sense of lack of belongingness and even fragility of one's relationship with one's self.

(2) Moniza Alvi's poetry is also marked by nostalgia and memories of India. In a poem *An Unknown Girl*, she describes her visit to India and the time when she had her hand hennaed by a girl in the market place. She could never forget the wonderful experience and likens it the tattooing to icing on cakes. The henna tattoo is linked with India and its colorful multi-

patterned culture. She says that she waters the country with English rain and covers it with English words. However, she knows that soon it will burst or fall like a meteor. This kind of experience indicates her 'rootlessness' as a diasporic poet.

(3) Diaspora from India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries in Britain has their 'Country at their Shoulders'. They have left their homeland, their birth place behind. Many of them have never visited their homeland but still they feel that it is the part and parcel of their imaginary or real lives.

(4) Moniza Alvi's poetry has a wider diverse range both in subject, approach and moods that are uneasy or celebratory. Very often, there is a light touch but rich imagery makes her poetry very effective. The poet's voice is delicate, distinct and memorable. Sometime, there is a philosophical tone as in *I would like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro*. She says:

"But I 'm fine where I am
I'll never make out what's going on
Around me, and that's the joy of it."¹⁹

She says that she is not a perfect circle and this fact makes her more interesting in the world. Philosophically speaking, the poem can be interpreted as the acceptance of incompleteness and also of detachment. As a diasporic poet, she accepts her root-lessness and absence of anchorage. Not only that, she probably celebrates her non-belonging-ness like a dot in the painting of Miro.

(5) Moniza Alvi in one of her poems refers to growing number of English words, changes in uses of punctuations and so on. Her father had inscribed her name in the middle of his dictionary but the poet says that she dare not do so as she has no courage to say that she owns the language. Moniza Alvi here refers to heterogeneous quality of English and also of her diasporic identity. In modern times because of the English language, the walls of dividing countries are crumbling and borders are expanding day by day.

(6) Recalling one's country, traditions and rituals strengthen the diasporic sensibility of the diasporic poets. The poems *Indian Cooking*, *Luckbir*,

Presents from my Aunts, in *Pakistan*, *The Country at My Shoulder*, *The Sari*, *Map of India*, *When Jaswinder Lets Loose her Hair* are nostalgic of India and Pakistan. The Indian style of cooking makes her taste the Indian landscape and customs of her father's country. Luckbir was the poet's aunt who lived a closed secluded life of a housewife and died young. The Sari symbolizes wider perspectives of Alvi belongs to Pakistan; for her undivided India symbolizes her motherland as she refers to India again and again. India is a vast country from geographical point of view but she says:

“India is manageable-smaller than
My hand, the Mahanadi River
Thinner than my life-line.”²⁰

(7) As a diaspora, Moniza Alvi answers to those who ask the immigrants to tamper with the roots by saying that they are ready to leave the Earth forever. Then, she offers a kind of umbilical cord to connect the immigrants up to the coldest stars. The immigrants assure them that:

“We'll stay in our city
opt for decent bread
lean unruly heads
against the walls.”

There is no rebellion or protest but assurance of assimilation, merger and acceptance of new home in her poetry on behalf of the diaspora struggling to survive in alien land. *The Bed* is a fine poem by Alvi that symbolizes and conceptualizes her philosophy of multiculturalism and all inclusiveness. The poet says that we have traveled many miles to find the bed that can accommodate the entire family and hold the tempests of our dreams. Finally, when we are accustomed to it, river will flow in the middle of the bed where all the horses of the King could drink together.

(8) *Souls* is a collection of poems by Moniza Alvi that shows her spiritual attitude towards life and the world. In Indian philosophy, the concept of nothingness signifies that it has potential to be filled with or to receive a little more. Alvi says: collect nothing which is not infinitely collectible.

Moniza Alvi describes souls in a variety of ways in highly poetical manner. She says that the worst thing for the souls is forgetting to fly. Souls escape from all kinds of enclosures; they come out of the box however hard we press them. Alvi says that souls play mischief by inhabiting shirts on the line. For souls, not years or days but the second is a great thing as they know the explosive nature of time.

Indian philosophy proclaims that body is a place of inhabitation for the soul. Moniza Alvi calls body a hotel for the soul to stay. The soul is drawn to the body's holes and windows knowing that one day, it would certainly leave. Souls wonder what we would be like without them. Souls always prefer to swim in the depth of simplicity. Alvi's poem *This Town* emphasizes the philosophical idea that we often think of a place as our home but in fact, we do not even own our breath. It is a gift given to us by soul.

Go back to England compares Pakistan with England where Moniza's mom took her when Moniza was only a few months old. Moniza's English mother tried to make Pakistan her home but, after the birth of the child, she left for England. The England, she was translated in to an English girl.

(9) The idea of distant place is central to Alvi. Her work is filled with glimpses and echoes of large areas of out of reach experiences. In a poem *For my Daughter* she says that there was another continent in her bones though she could not think of it like that. Her poems have surreal agility, seemingly direct and light but often ominous. In *How the stone finds its Voice*, there is a poem that adopts the voice of a husband who speaks about the subtleties and complexities of his wife. The husband in her poem *Aster Escher* bemoans his failure to understand and write about his wife accurately. He says:

“She is not the woman I met
She never was.”

Moniza Alvi's voice is amazing original in dealing with post 9/11 trauma and what it meant to be a Muslim in the USA and Europe. In her collection

of poems *Europa*, she explores post-traumatic stress disorder and meaning of rape while mining the international politics of east and west through the myth of Europa. The poems in the collection restage Europa's rape, when the world's divine ruler, disguised as a bull. Europa symbolizes a Muslim girl whose headscarf in post 9/11 Europa is a divisive badge of an alien culture. Within the myth of Europa, Alvi sets the Middle Eastern echoes of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine ringing, where peace is hiding in darkness, not wishing to be found. As a poet, she feels that a poet can bear witness to the damage and give voice to it. May be, the poet cannot remove all evils of the world but she can certainly strike at their roots. Moniza Alvi avoided political references in her earlier poetry has come out vigorously in her later collections of poems hitting at the intolerance and superficial humanism of the western countries after 9/11. Like Europa, a woman is the worst sufferer throughout human history.

Jean Arsanayagam is one of the most powerful diasporic poets with a difference. Unlike, the South Asian poets living in the USA, Europe or Canada as immigrants, she is a Dutch Burgher married to a Tamil. She was born in a Burgher family in the hill town of Kandy. The Dutch Burghers are the offspring of intermarriages between Dutch men and women of the indigenous communities a kind of split inheritance. That is the reason why Jean Arsanayagam says, "I have suckled on a breast shaped by the genetics of history". What makes her a true diaspora is her complete rootlessness and dislocation in Sri Lanka where she went through the terrible experiences of ethnic violence as a minority, both as a Dutch Burgher and the wife of a Tamil man. Arsanayagam's major poetical works include *Kindura*, *Apocalypse' 83*, *A Colonial Inheritance and other poems*, *Out of Our Prisons We Emerge*, *Trial by Terror*, *Reddened Waters Flow Clear*, *Shooting the Floricans*, *Women*, *All women* etc. The following are the characteristics of her poetry.

(1) Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is a major concern of Arsanayagam's poetry. She has personally experienced insecurity and fear experienced by the

minorities in Sri Lanka. There were attacks on Tamil community by the Sinhalese in the post-independence period. This violence and its consequences are the theme of several of her best poems: for example '1958...71...77...81...83'. In other poems she brings out the impact of civil war on the country's North.

(2) Issues and problems of identity and self-definition are another key theme of Arsanayagam's poetry. As a member of an English-speaking Burgher minority, a descendent of the Dutch colonizers of the country, Arsanayagam is uneasy and feels marginalized in Sri Lanka. She is unable to arrive at a stable and valid sense of identity. In *A Colonial Inheritance* she says that all that "history" has given her is "a name I do not want".

(3) Jean Arsanayagam suffers from the burden of double diaspora. She is a Dutch Burgher, and a wife of a Tamil and a woman in violence torn Sri Lanka. During wars and violence, women are always the worst sufferers. Arsanayagam's poems and short stories reflect the tragic, ethnic, social and political conflicts of the country. The tragedy lies in the facts that she tries to assimilate into Tamil culture respecting the rituals of her in-laws but her husband's family never accepted her as own. In her earlier works, she even referred to Buddhist legends, showing her veneration towards Buddhism but the Sinhala Buddhists did not recognize her reverence for Buddhism and she was not spared. Thus she could not belong anywhere.

(4) In Arsanayagam's *Kindura*, the title poem is suggestive of hybridity as the bird Kindura is half human, half bird. Neither avian nor human, both avian and human – the Kindura appears self-complete in its hybridity and its profile imperturbable. However, her hybridity achieves unsettling dimension as its outward calm is re-signified as immobility. The doubleness of the Kindura – its capacity for dynamic action and arrested flight symbolizes the poet's self identity as a woman and poet. It signifies submerged and unfulfilled, unrealized personality.

(5) There is different manifestation and ambivalence in the treatment of Buddhist mythology in Jean Arsanayagam's works. Her fascinations for Buddhism waned as anti-Tamil racial violence broke out in Sri Lanka, of which she too was an unwitting victim. At first she was an onlooker, a

witness but once she was in it, she realized that history has a meaning. In *Apocalypse 83* she portrays the accounts of violence highlighting its futility but in her later poetry, she dwells on the theme of identity that arose from the traumatic experience of violence in 1983. Thus 1983 was a turning point in her literary career that marked a nose of urgency and political awareness in her post 83 writings. The sense of mythic calm of *Kindura* is gone and is replaced by hardened hybrid consciousness aware of constant threat by the majority community.

(6) As a sensitive poet, Jean Arsanayagam re examines her own colonial roots as her father belonged to the Dutch community that came to Sri Lanka during the days of colonial rule. She is aware of colonial violence and economic exploitations of the indigenous people. In one of her poems the persona looks at Dutch artifacts through a glass case. Her reflection on the glass surface reminds her of her connection to history. She knows that colonial legacy was one of the reasons for the marginalization of the Burghers. Though the Burghers are thoroughly assimilated in Sri Lankan society, they continue to be seen as the bearers of an oppressive colonial legacy. Arsanayagam therefore, blames no one but the forces of history that generates violence as consequence of economic exploitation or colonial subjugation. She does not shy away from colonialism's exploitative history. In a poem *Genealogies*, she calls herself a product of "some brief Bliss" hinting at its accidental nature. However, this accidental union begets love, hope and dreams. Her Burgher identity was not acquired by weapons and violence but by the miracle called 'birth'.

(7) Jean Arsanayagam's work also seeks a broader identification with the sufferings of women who were victims rather than agents of a patriarchal colonialism. She chronicles the sufferings of Dutch orphan virgins who were brought to Sri Lanka to be sexual partners of second class Dutch colonizers. Many young virgins died in childbirths. Arsanayagam depicts the tragic displacement and deaths of such young virgins. She re-enacts the sufferings of a young woman who has been robbed of her right over her body, her life and her fate.

(8) Jean Arsanayagam says that like all other women, she too is a victim of patriarchal power and initiations of society. But she is different from other as she is a poet. As a poet there lies within her a power for known only to himself.

“No one knows that I have a magic
in my brain”

On ordinary level of life, poets are not different from others. They are anonymous commoners who a magic in their brains. This is the magic of imagination. It is the power of nation that allows her to inform the world of her and follow being's sufferings. Through this power she creates spaces that go beyond the spaces allocated to them (women) by society. As a diasporic poet, she is doubly burdened being a Dutch Burgher and a woman married to Tamil but at the same time, she feels that she doubly blessed both as a woman and poet.

(9) Like all diasporic poets, memories, self-discovery, nostalgia for childhood and inheritance seeking one's roots, history of one's country or community, - these are the stepping stones in Arsanayagam's journey to uncover her roots and the legacies that define her identity. Her inheritance, drawn from many genealogical strands in the west, forges a unique identity in an island in the east. Her works with poetry and prose abound in rich harvest of memories. She looks at her own life very dispassionately and impersonally.

(10) Arsanayagam's stylistic range is very broad. Her work *Women all Women* (published by writers' workshop Calcutta, 2000) contains poems about women. Poverty, ageing and change are the other important themes that she deals with in this collection. Some of these poems describe cultural barriers. The most important aspect of Arsanayagam's poetry is her stance as an outsider. Her power of observations is very sharp and she paints vivid pictures of women from all strata.

It must be acknowledged that among the five diasporic women poets under the study, Jean Arsanayagam's is the most authentic voice. She can be termed as a true Cassandra in exile.

She voices not mere personal sufferings but universal sufferings of all who are victims of wars, violence, colonization and patriarchy. She does not claim to be a feminist but her poems and fictional works show how women are victimized in ethno-political conflicts, colonized countries and violence which are in fact the inevitable consequences of patriarchal system.

The common characteristics that bind these diasporic women poets can be summed up as follows:

(1) In the works of all the five diasporic women poets, sense of uprootedness and dislocation is clearly expressed. However, its intensity differs. For example, in Meena Alexander, it is quite dominant and in Arsanayagam's it is the recurrent theme. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni feels happier abroad. Moniza Alvi stands for acceptance and inclusiveness. Sujata Bhatt feels that she carries home wherever she goes.

(2) Sense of insecurity and alienation in all diasporic poets are palpable as it is the destiny of almost all immigrants. Meena Alexander and Jean Arsanayagam have undergone these experiences in different contexts. After 9/11, Meena Alexander felt insecure and alienated in the USA. Arsanayagam was the worst sufferer during the ethno-political violence in Sri Lanka. Her life was in danger in those days. However, she holds no grudges against anybody.

(3) Nostalgia for homeland, family and traditions of one's community is a recurrent trait in all diasporic poets. Meena Alexander recalls her maternal grandfather, grandmother and her house in Tiruvella. She also recalls her childhood days, family traditions etc. Sujata Bhatt remembers her mother, grandmother, grandfather and prominent places of Ahmedabad. She refers to animals and birds, mythological characters like Hanuman, Ganesha, Kalika and so on. She recalls rituals and customs also as a part of her

nostalgia. Moniza Alvi is fascinated by the clothes and jewellery from her aunt. She remembers colorful tattoos in India, the Sari and so on. Chitra Banerjee refers to Indian traditions in critical manners. She feels that most of the Indian traditions are anti-woman and aim at suppression and subordination of women.

(4) These diasporic women poets mourn the loss of the language, their mother tongue and their native culture. Foreign language encroaches upon one's mother tongue. Sujata Bhatt says that one cannot live with two tongues in one's mouth. However, she is reconciled that her dreams are in her mother tongue and English will never replace Gujarati completely. Meena Alexander also feels robbed of her mother tongue and is sad about the illiteracy in one's own language. Moniza Alvi also remonstrates that she never knew her father's language. Chitra Banerjee in a poem *Leaving Yuba City* says that though Sushma leaves her home for USA, she is bound by common language with her parents whom she has left.

(5) These diasporic women poets experience the sense of exile. However, it differs from poet to poet. Women in exile experience the loss of identity and they search for their identity. At first, it leads to unhappiness, then to eventual healing and regeneration. Sharing of mutual experiences help in healing the pain of exile. All cultures and religions limit the boundaries of women's lives and segregate them from the rest of society. Education and training of women limit their physical mobility and sexuality. All such experiences create a sense of exile among these poets. Exile can become a positive thing for them. They have no fixed anchorages and enjoy freedom to choose. They continue to nourish old ties with music, literature, food, ceremonies and celebrations etc. in exile. Literary writings also flourish in exile and women in exile stand on their own feet, support themselves and others. The sense of exile among the women poets has given birth to creative upsurge. These five women poets are the product of these exiled states which has compelled them to seek their identity and give expression to their creative urges. For Meena Alexander and Arsanayagam, the exiled state is a catalyst for their creativity.

(6) Diasporic poets, male and women, experience victimization, racial discrimination, intolerant attitude of the majority in one or the other way at one or the other time. Even highly placed South Asians have experienced racial/color discrimination in Europe, the USA or Canada. In a country like Sri Lanka, Arsanayagam's family underwent violent attacks during ethnic violence. These women poets have come face to face with racialism, patriarchy, colonization, ethnic intolerance and violence. People often fail to notice incidents of intolerance and sufferings of minorities in their own South Asian country but when they face ethnic/racial intolerance abroad, they realize enormity of such incidents in their homelands too. When we read about the attacks on Asians in Australia, we are naturally shocked and angry. However, the incidents of ethnic violence in Gujarat, massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, killings of the Dalits in many parts of Gujarat should sadden us and make our heads bow down in shame. Double standard in our attitude is not only shameful but dangerous.

These five diasporic poets are genuinely concerned about ethnic violence, racialism, patriarchal subjugation and intolerance everywhere. Both Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt have referred to ethnic violence in Gujarat. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni deals with all kinds of injustice, evil practices and Subjugation of women. Her feminist stance is a voice of rebellion against any kind of discrimination against women. Arsanayagam has presented the fatality of violence and wars in her poetry. Moniza Alvi refers to intolerant attitude of the Western countries after 9/11.

(7) These five diasporic women poets write women – centered narratives. They reject the yoke of a gendered feminine, feminine identity and reconstruct a new independent feminine identity in foreign culture. However, they look at motherhood in a different way from the usual western out look towards motherhood, maternity, birthing and matrilineal relationships. For an Indian woman, motherhood confers upon woman a purpose and distinct identity. Meena Alexander recalls her matrilineal grandparents very fondly who had influenced her attitude towards life and the world distinctly. Sujata Bhatt refers to her grandmother, mother, aunt

and grandfather, recalling particularly the strength of Indian women. Moniza Alvi also remembers her mother, her aunt and even her English grandmother. Arsanayagam recalls her mother-in-law who initially neglected her but later passed on the mythological goddess like power to her. Chitra's poems are woman centered and bring out the power and strength of third generation women and how the first and the second generations of women strategically strengthened and inspired their daughters to become independent and strong. Birthing metaphors are quite eye-catching in Meena Alexander's and Sujata Bhatt's poems. The poem *Blood Line* is dedicated to 'Svati Miriam, one year old'. She writes:

"She is my mother's
Mother who cries in me
My line of blood
Our perpetuity."

In Alexander's poetry, there is a frequent reference to women's bodies, their burden and the fences of barbed wire caused by their vulnerability.

(8) All poets are born prophets who have been warning human beings against the dangers from within and without since time immemorial. Ved Vyas, the author of Mahabharata said that he proclaimed to the world the dangers of war and intolerance raising his hands but no one heeded him seriously. This is the tragic fate of all poets. These five women poets are called 'Cassandra' for their prophetic voice that goes unheeded. All these five women poets have spoken against the evils of patriarchy, colonization, ethnic violence, intolerance, racialism and evil practices and superstitions in South Asian countries. They speak out against the so-called liberalism of the west and also against the age-old evil traditions that crush the spirit of women. They glorify womanhood where in lies the creative source of life, art and culture.

(9) Poetry is a source of strength and tenderness for these poets. Meena Alexander says that in the time of violence, poetry provides us the courage

and tenderness to live. The paramount question is how to live in strife-torn world. The very act of writing is intrinsic to the act a living. Poetry for her is 'the music of Survival'. Jean Arsanayagam writes that on the surface, she is like all the women but there lies within her "a magic in her Brain". It is the magic of creativity that can confront the harsh realities of life bravely.

Relevance of the Research:

My research is highly relevant in the globalised world today. E.M. Forster in one of his essays wrote that in modern world where peoples of different nations come close to one another due to scientific and technological advancement, of all virtues tolerance is the virtue that needs to be cultivated today. Intolerance leads to ethnic, racial tension resulting in violence and war. Diasporic literature reflects this tension but the ultimate solution lies in the acceptance of the other. South Asian people constitute the largest number of immigrants in the European countries, the USA, Canada and Australia. The Indian diaspora today forms not only the largest diaspora but a unique work force in the world's culture today.

Historically, the origin of modern Indian diaspora lies mainly in the colonial rule in India and the incorporation of India into the British Empire. The Indians were taken to far-flung countries of the Empire as indented labor in the 19th century. Over two million men fought under the Empire in numerous wars including the two world wars. Indians formed a large chunk of traders in African countries who moved to England or other western countries after these countries were free from the colonial rule. Educated Indians migrated to England, the USA, Canada and Australia for further studies and better prospects. Indians have made their presence felt in all fields-trade, technology, IT, Computer Science, Medicine, space researching, economics, Music, art and literature etc.

These diaspora continue to keep in touch with their mother land, her rituals, traditions, festivals and so on. Hindi films (Bollywood films) and music play role of a unique bonding among all Indian diaspora. The Indian system of arranged marriage furnishes an example of common culture. Indian Kathakars who give religion discourses in the Gita, the Ramayan, and the Bhagvat etc are quite popular in Europe, the USA and Canada among the Indian diaspora. Newspapers published by Indian communities also flourish besides literary journals and magazines. Five diasporic women poets from diverse background are chosen here for the study. The research throws light on the impact of their diasporic sensibilities on their writings. These women poets are the most appropriate examples of women diasporic poets who express personal, diasporic and universal elements. Multiculturalism in modern times should be seen as an opportunity for flourishing and flowering rather than as a problem. I reiterate that the solution of all problems regarding diasporic dilemma lies in acceptance of diversity, multiculturalism, assimilation and expansion of one's identity into global one. Nostalgia and memories of homeland are natural human phenomenon which occurs within the country also when one moves from one place to another. It is true that alien culture would often come as a shock but tolerance assimilation, harmony and understanding are the solution of al diasporic problems.

Extension of the Research

My research can be extended into full length study of major diasporic women poets, women fiction writers .While my research work, I felt that regional diasporic literature needs to be studied deeply. Gujarati diaspora writers/poets have also done a considerably remarkable work. The same is true of Punjabi poets and writers and of other regional writers. I would like to pursue post – doctoral research in Gujarati diasporic writings.

Challenges Faced In My Research Work

I enjoyed my research work on diasporic women poets immensely. It was a labor of love and sheer joy. However, I faced certain problems/challenges in finding all poetical works of these women poets. My friends in the USA took great pains and bought, some of the important collections of poetry and sent them to me through international courier services. One of my relatives went on Sri Lanka tour. He also took great pains for finding Jean Arsanayagam's works. However, internet came to my rescue and I could find major poems of all these five poets. The study of poetry is always difficult. It contains layers and layers of meanings. Images and metaphors have to be unfolded and examined with care and utmost sensitivity. Poetry or literature for that matter exists in context-political, cultural, historical, and even autobiographical and hence they have to be studied with utmost care in the relevant context. Poets are a powerful witness who sees through the incidents of history inclusively. I feel deeply that poetry needs to be studied through research works extensively. Teachers should encourage the students to read and appropriate poetry as it has been assigned the title of 'mantra', the purveyor of eternal truth.

In my study I have found that the diasporic poets are poet first and therefore labeling often harms rather than helps. To put these poets into pigeon holes of diasporic poets would do injustice to them. Their poetry contains elements that are other than diasporic sensibilities. There are elements of eroticism, romance, love for landscapes, love and appreciation of various arts like painting, sculpture, photography, films etc. Like all great poetry, it has elements that have permanent and universal appeal.

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