

**In Between Cultures and Identities: Reflections on Multiculturalism
in Diaspora Literature**



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ABSTRACT

In a bid to elaborate on the topic as to how diasporic South Asian and Caribbean writers are creating and reshaping the boundaries of literary texts, I wish to put forward my thesis as a continual process where a few notable writers of South Asian origin have redefined the boundaries of a post- colonial identity. Through a reading of some their notable works, I have found that the question of identity and inhabitation has undergone many levels of assimilation in order to come to the present state of being.

Diaspora brings to mind various contested ideas and images. It can be a positive site for the affirmation of an identity, or, conversely, a negative site of fears of losing that identity.

Diaspora signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity: of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, times. What distinguishes diaspora from some other types of travel is its centripetal dimension. It does not only mean that people are dispersed in different places but that they congregate in other places, forming new communities. In such gatherings, new allegiances are forged that supplant earlier commitments. New imagined communities arise that not simply substitute old ones but form a hybrid space which is rediscovered in between various identifications. This is only taking place in recent times when Post-colonial literature have come to the fore as a ways and means to distinguish other spheres of writing from the writings of a pre-colonial time. History, culture and an imagined space provided by writers have always given us scope to reinvent ourselves in myriad ways. My efforts to work on this thesis may have provided some answers while some questions do remain unanswered which may find favourable response in another time.

Introduction**In between cultures and identities.**

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream

His wings are clipped and his feet are tied

So he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings

With a fearful trill

Of things unknown

But longed for still

As his tune is heard

On the distant hill

For the caged bird

sings of freedom.

The above excerpt from the poem, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by the African-American writer, Maya Angelou gives us many different ideas about freedom and captivity. In the writer's case, the background was more autobiographical in nature. Yet, we may presume that, that is what goes through all our minds whenever our independence, be it physical or moral, comes into question. People who migrate to unknown lands eventually make their homes there but they still long for what they left behind. Every duty is done according to the adopted land, yet the feeling that they could have been more at ease in their own ethnic surroundings linger to make them feel uneasy. That is a dilemma every immigrant feels in their adopted lands.

The term “diaspora,” which can be traced back to the ancient Greek word for dispersion (*OED*), was originally conceived to refer to the scattered populations of Jews forced into exile from their homeland. In the contemporary world of mass migration, instant global communication and low-cost travel, diaspora refers less frequently to those who have permanently left or been banished, and more often to those who effortlessly criss-cross the globe between their new and old countries and everywhere in between.

Diasporas, the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, is a central historical fact of colonization. Colonialism itself was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world. The widespread effects of these migrations (such as that which has been termed ecological imperialism) are still going on a global scale. The descendants of the diasporic movements generated by colonialism have developed their own distinctive cultures which both preserve and often extend and develop their originary cultures. The development of diasporic cultures necessarily questions essentialist models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, ‘natural’ cultural norm, one that underpins the centre/margin model of colonialist discourse. It also questions the simpler kinds of theories of nativism which suggest that decolonization can be effected by a recovery or reconstruction of pre-colonial societies. The most recent and most socially significant diasporic movements have been those of colonized peoples back to the metropolitan centres. In countries such as Britain and France, the population now has substantial minorities of diasporic ex-colonial peoples. In recent times, the notion of a ‘diasporic identity’ has been adopted by many writers as a positive affirmation of their hybridity.¹

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaspora>

In a bid to elaborate on the matter as to how diasporic South Asian and Caribbean writers are creating and reshaping the boundaries of identity, I wish to put forward my thesis as a continual process where a few notable writers of South Asian origins have redefined the boundaries of a post-colonial identity. Through a reading of some their notable works, I have found that the question of identity and inhabitation has undergone many levels of assimilation in order to come to the present state of being.

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Diaspora signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity: of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, times. What distinguishes diaspora from some other types of travel is its centripetal dimension. It does not only mean that people are dispersed in different places but that they congregate in other places, forming new communities. In such gatherings, new allegiances are forged that supplant earlier commitments. New imagined communities arise that not simply substitute old ones but form a hybrid space which is rediscovered in between various identifications. This is only taking place in recent times when Post-colonial literatures have come to the fore as a way and means to distinguish other spheres of writing from the writings of a pre-colonial time.

The term 'postcolonial' carries all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates, and does not restrict the meaning of the term to 'after-colonialism' or after-independence. Postcolonial theory thus involves discussions about experiences of various kinds like representation, difference, suppression, resistance, slavery, race, gender, migration, place, landscapes or people. It also responds to the authoritative discourses of imperial Europe, such as history, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and even

the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all of these came into being. None of these is 'essentially' postcolonial, but together they form the complex framework of this field.

My thesis would aim to look at these emerging thought processes in order to come to the conclusion that South Asian literature of these kinds look to form a separate yet completely functional way to define itself. In my opinion, the question of being "in-between" regardless of location, ethnic origin, age or gender, immigrants in any part of the world have to deal with and treat the confusion of cultural identity throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the treatment of this confusion differs according to age and gender, as every generation, every man and woman, every individual, immigrant or native alike, have their own tasks and ways of realizing their fluid, hybrid identities. And if we all succeed in doing so, our multi-racial countries can finally become the ones where multiculturalism is a functioning reality, where diversity is celebrated and hybridity is a part of everyday life which will eventually become a natural and accepted phenomenon.

Various forms of dislocation, such as exile, diaspora, and migration, have been productively and extensively explored in both postcolonial theory and literary texts. Here, we shall explore how and why these phenomena, especially as they are associated with colonialism and its aftermath, have become central topics of postcolonial thought. Although diaspora has undeniably brought about profound changes in the demographics, cultures, epistemologies and politics of the post-colonial world, whether the sole emphasis on displacement--as opposed to indigeneity, belonging, or residence--is true to the postcolonial condition, remains an issue.

It is an undisputed historical fact that the past century has witnessed the large-scale displacement and dispersal of populations across the world as a result of major political upheavals, among them the two European wars, decolonization and the Cold war. Following on these changes came - globalization, spurred by free trade and increased capital flows, and new technologies of communication, information, and travel, has accelerated the movement of people, commodities, ideas, and cultures across the world. Diaspora is regarded not as a singular phenomenon but as historically varied and heterogeneous in its aspects. The transnational mobility of people may be the result of forced or voluntary migration, of self-exile or expulsion. Refugees, people in transit, are the product of war, ethnic conflict and natural calamity.

Under the generalized rubric of 'diaspora,' we will touch on some of the following topics: the histories of slavery and indentured labor, the material aspects of migrant labor and livelihood, the experiences of displacement and homelessness, the ideologies of 'home' and nation, the cultures of diaspora, the politics of multiculturalism, the predicament of minorities, the redefinition of cosmopolitanism, identity questions (belonging, national origins, assimilation, acculturation), and issues relating to race. Postcolonial cultural studies has a special interest in theorizing the 'new' phenomena of borders and borderlands, mixing, hybridity, language (for example, global English), translation, double consciousness, history and in the affective dimensions of migration and diaspora which includes the ideas of homesickness, memory, nostalgia and a pervading sense of melancholia. Diaspora is a multidisciplinary field, and I will draw on the writings of Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Zadie Smith and the theories put forward by Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and other notable authorities on this subject.

The beginning of Indian literature in English, with relation to colonialism can very much be traced to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, by which time English education was more or less steadfastly grounded in the three major centres of British power in India - Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. However, the changes came in the pattern of Indian English literature during the post colonial era. Post-colonial literature is a body of literary writings that thoroughly 'opposes' the preaching of colonisation. Ideally therefore, the Post-colonial English literature in India, often involves writings, which deal with consequences of de-colonisation or the political and cultural independence of people once quashed by colonial rule. Post-colonial Indian English literature, eventually in its most recent form, also tries to assess the contemporary post-colonial discussion that has been taking shape over a considerable period of time. It endeavours to re-read this very emergence of post-colonialism and its literary formulation itself.

Post-colonialism in Indian English literature can be termed as the continual shaking off of the old skin of Western thought and the emergence of new consciousness and cognizance, critique and celebration. Armed with this new awareness, comes the concept of self-expression. In a country like India, prior to 1947, most people branded and recognised themselves as 'Indians', against the identity of their British tyrants and tormentors. A potential feeling of communal, national identity, nurtured by a shared antipathy and bitterness of the British colonial prowess was perceived. However, post 1947, after being granted autonomy, the Republic of India's populace slowly fell to bits and crumbled into more and more divided factions, as the "national" identity shrunk. People, on the other hand, discovered other, closer groups to identify with. The indefinite, confusing and variable nature of 'national identity' is thus vital and central to a discussion of post-colonial Indian English literary theories, as identification with one group without doubt leads to discrimination and

segregation with others.²

India became independent from Britain in 1947 and the English language was supposed to be terminated gradually by 1965. However, in present times, English and Hindi are the two official languages in this land. Colonialism usually performed its work through the use of 'brutal force', exerted by one country to exploit another community and gain economic affluence. Colonialism most frequently was the ill-treatment and cruelty of the native people. The post-colonial perspective in Indian English literature had emerged as a challenge to this tradition and legacy and endeavours to illegitimise the idea of grounding power through conquest. Indian literature in English which is accessible to readers in the West, still owes its roots in colonial literature and the tensions rising between East and West. A European naturalism is often present in such a genre, a concern to conceive India as the field, within which Western readers can identify realities. Such theories and lights are very much inherent within much of this body of writing. The colonial writers, who had begun to pen down their thoughts during the 1930s or 1940s, were in some instances, still living post Independence, only to share the common yet perhaps unexplainable thought of surviving under suppression and then suddenly being emancipated. However, it was in the later part of the 1960s that postcolonial Indian English literature had begun to display its full bloom.

Post-colonial English literature in India works through the process of "writing back", "re-writing" and "re-reading". This delineates the rendering of well-known literature from the point of view of the formerly colonised. Indian English Literature (IEL), as was seen before, pertains to that body of work by writers in India, who pen in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the several regional languages of India. It is also

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonial_literature

associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie, who was born in India but raised outside. This body of Indian English literature is commonly referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. (Indo-Anglian is a specific term in the exclusive context of writing, which however is not confused with the expression Anglo-Indian). As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of post-colonial English literature in India.

South Asian diasporic literature began somewhere in the nineteenth century. At this point, South Asians have migrated to many parts of the world for economic, political, or cultural reasons, and approximately 20 million of them are scattered across some 125 countries. Since the 1950s, expatriate writers have published literary works in South Asian and European languages with increasing frequency. Their fiction, poetry, drama, autobiographies, travelogues, and other nonfiction works are prominent in the contemporary literature in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu, as well as in Nepali, Sinhala, and other languages. Some of the best postcolonial Urdu and English writers from Pakistan, for instance, live in England, Canada, or the United States. The best-known diasporic literature of South Asian origin has appeared in English since the 1960s; its authors include Zulfikar Ghose, Hanif Kureishi, Sara Suleri, A. K. Ramanujan, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, Michael Ondaatje, and Shyam Selvadurai.

The major indigenous literary languages of modern South Asia and their long-standing literary traditions have been in continual contact with one another over the past five hundred to one thousand years. As part of a large constellation of interacting and interdependent literatures, each has influenced and been influenced by other neighboring or distant

literatures. The establishment of print culture and the development of modern prose and a variety of modern genres early in the colonial period accelerated and strengthened the mutual influences of South Asian literatures.

Translation has played a central role in this process. Between about 1915 and 1945, Bengali fiction by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sharat Chandra Chatterjee was translated rapidly into many of the other subcontinental languages, thus reaching a large readership, and became models for new fiction. Similarly, in the mid-twentieth century, progressive and experimental fiction in Hindi and Urdu—by Munshi Premchand, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, and Qurratulain Hyder, among others—influenced writing in most other indigenous languages. In the postcolonial period, plays are translated almost simultaneously with the first productions in the original language; a successful new play may thus reach audiences through performance in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, and other languages even before the original text has been published.

South Asian literature has also been influenced by its own past and by foreign literature. Sanskrit and Persian have profoundly affected many of the modern languages and their literature, aesthetics, and broader culture. Since the seventeenth century, European languages such as Portuguese, French, and English have been in close contact with South Asian languages. More specifically, between the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the works of William Shakespeare as well as English and French Romantic poetry and realistic and naturalistic fiction (by, for example, William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, and Émile Zola) stimulated South Asian writing. In the twentieth century, the variety of foreign influences widened to include the Russian novel and short story; the drama of Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht; the Anglo-American modernism of Ezra

Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf; classical Chinese poetry and the Japanese Noh and Haiku traditions; American beat and confessional poetry; Latin American magical realism; Hungarian poetry and fiction; and the African postcolonial novel. Each of these sources has engendered fresh insights and experiments in sub continental literary cultures which have eventually made it richer and more profound.

“The term ‘diaspora’ was only brought into the contemporary cultural debate after the notion of multiculturalism had been fully established and had begun to be contested from within the field of cultural studies. Multiculturalism refers to the recognition of the co-existence of differing cultures within one nation.’ ³(Reichardt, 289)

I draw the conclusion to my introduction with Homi Bhabha, as he concludes his *The Location of Culture*:

What is crucial to such a vision of the future is the belief that we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical.⁴ (256)

³ Reichardt, Ulfried . From Multiculturalism to Diaspora. Diaspora and Muticulturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments. Ed. Monika Fludernik, Rodopi2003

⁴ Bhaba, Homi. The location of Culture. :London, Routledge:1994

Chapter - 1

Fragmented Identity and A Self in Exile: A journey through Salman Rushdie's

Midnight's Children and Fury:

From being a favoured child of the Sinais of respectable Kashmiri descent, an outwardly unpresentable boy, Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, becomes a pickle maker after a long arduous journey through life, a life that played tricks on him from the beginning as he had been switched at birth for the actual Sinai child by the lady who became his employer after he had lost his family and loved ones. Yet, in the end, Saleem seems to have come to terms with his fate, as the millions of his countrymen in India had done along with him. He says with a resigned air of acceptance:

One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be too overpowering, tears may rise to eyes: I hope, nevertheless that it will be possible to say to them that they possess the authentic taste of truth... that they are, despite everything, acts of love.(MC,644)

In his writings, Salman Rushdie seems to struggle with the question whether the yearning for authenticity and a national culture is directly related to the colonial experience. He resists being pigeonholed in one particular culture. He refers to authenticity as "the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism" which "demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogenous and unbroken tradition" (Imaginary Homelands, 67). Rushdie insists that his purpose is not to create "authentic" Indian literature but validates his position as a postcolonial writer by stressing the valuable qualities of having two countries to draw from. Growing up in a country that was greatly influenced by British rule, attending British schools, and migrating to England in his mid-teens inevitably westernized

Rushdie's perspective. Instead of viewing this "double identity" as a negative spiral into the clutches of Western colonialism, Rushdie uses it to his benefit as a form of decolonization. This double perspective gives him "stereoscopic vision" which allows him to simultaneously look at two societies from both the inside and the outside. Rushdie states that postcolonial Indian writers who have migrated from India "are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight' (Imaginary Homelands, 19). Because of their multiple backgrounds and experiences, writers in Rushdie's position are able to recreate reality in a way that is directly related to their postcolonial identities. These plural identities provide them with various angles to analyze and recreate reality within their fictions.

Rushdie, by the very nature of his diverse background, is the product of multiple identities. One of his greatest thematic focuses is the notion of place and migration and how this creates plural identities. Multiple rooting leads to multiple identities; this parallels the multiplicity of national identities within India as well as Saleem's issues with reconciling his own multiple identities within *Midnight's Children*.

The Indian sub-continent has always been associated with concepts of multiplicity and plurality. Is it possible for a country as diverse as India to be defined by a homogenous and authentic national identity? Rushdie denies the need for a national culture and in doing so disrupts the colonial effect of homogenization. "One of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that—as far as India is concerned, anyway—it is completely misleading to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw. The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a *mélange* of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American." (Imaginary Homelands, 67)

Home to more than twenty different languages and numerous dialects, India is defined by its diverse plurality. Two dominant religions—Hindu and Islam—as well as numerous other religious groups that include Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, and Christians, further pluralize the identity of this nation. Rushdie avoids the concept of a homogenous Indian culture and states, “My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity...to my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once.” (Imaginary Homelands,32).

The multiplicity and plurality of India is a dominant theme within *Midnight's Children* and is what Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, refers to when he says that there are many versions of Indians as there are many of India itself. This plural national identity mirrors itself in Saleem's life; his story becomes the story of a new nation. The desire to reclaim the India of his past was the driving force behind Rushdie's decision to write *Midnight's Children* – the Booker Prize winning novel was born when Rushdie realized how much he wanted to restore his past identity to himself. *Midnight's Children* was his first literary attempt to recapture Bombay and India. The novel explores the ways in which history is given meaning through the retelling of individual experience. History is seen subjectively through the eyes of the protagonist Saleem Sinai, therefore the retelling of history is fragmented and, at times, erroneous.

Many themes in Rushdie's writing weave themselves through his work, although history always plays an integral role in establishing the framework of his stories. According to Rushdie: “Literature is not in the business of copyrighting certain themes for certain groups.the real risks of any artist are taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what

is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what is possible to think. Books become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it.....” (Imaginary Homelands, 15). History provides Rushdie with the backdrop necessary to develop motifs, exploring the complexities of identity, migration, politics, and love. There is a wealth of criticism on Rushdie that simultaneously hails him as one of the most prominent representatives of Anglo-Indian postcolonial literature, yet which also questions his authenticity and criticizes the misrepresentation of modern India in his texts. As an Indian expatriate living in England and writing in English, Rushdie is able to view and write about his homeland with objectivity, yet distance from his subject likewise causes the fragmentation of memory and, at times, unreliable narrative techniques. For this reason, Rushdie’s position as an expatriate-postcolonial writer functions as a double-edged sword; he is praised for his objectivity yet criticized for his inauthentic representations of modern India.

At this juncture, Rushdie’s own clarification about the use of history and myths in the text need to be discussed. Rushdie had been the target of many an irate critic/reader who were quite unhappy about the way he had been erroneously using Hindu mythology, about the train routes coming from Delhi to Bombay, about the ranks used by the Pakistan Army, the actual manufacturers of the cigarette brand state Express 555, whether General Dyer was accompanied by white or black troops on the day of the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. When readers find out that the writer had been somewhat sloppy in his research about a book he had written, it gives them pleasure when they point it out. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie says:

Time and migration had placed a double filter between me and my subject, and I hoped that if I could only imagine vividly enough, it might be possible to see beyond those filters, to write as if the years had not passed, as if I had never left India for the

West. But as I worked I found that what interested me was the process of filtration itself. So, my subject changed, was no longer a search for lost time, had become the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool. (24)

Rushdie has designed his characters in such a way that he manages to reinvent himself through the distortions of history and accidental adventures of birth and adulthood. Saleem himself is a chronicler of events and his own life takes on the whirlwind tour India itself is taking through the years of its own tumultuous growth. The attempts at weaving the plot and numerous sub plots in the book with the actual happenings in history may have been a shot at Rushdie understanding of his own migrant life.

History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to 'read' the world.⁵ (25)

Midnight's Children is a book that deals with 1001 children born on August 15, 1947, at the very stroke of midnight, the very momentous hour when India shook off the shackles of the long imperial rule by the British. On a very specific level this book deals with two of those children, however, both born in a Bombay nursing home and switched at birth. One of them belongs to a wealthy Muslim family which has its roots in Kashmir, the Sinais, while the other belongs to a Hindu street singer and an Englishman she had happened to meet. The aristocrat, who grows up believing he is poor, is named Shiva while the poor half Hindu, half English boy, who is taken home by the aristocratic Muslim family is named Saleem. Saleem

⁵ Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta Books, 1992

Sinai is the narrator of this book with its myriad language and historical overtures. *Midnight's Children*, however, is far from being a conventional story of "switched babies." It reflects an extremely complex context of post-colonial Indian English literature and can be viewed as the quintessential fictional novel for illustrating the near overwhelming and implausible difficulties, innate in creating a national identity amongst a hugely heterogeneous post-colonial society.

"To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world," says Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*. Born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the day of India's independence from British rule, Saleem's life is a microcosm of post-Independent India. In order to make meaning out of his life, Saleem must first "swallow the world:" he must understand his country's colonial past; make sense out of its burgeoning independent present; and come to terms with his (and India's) postcolonial identity. Rushdie, like his autobiographical protagonist Saleem, is also a product of postcolonial India. Born in Bombay in 1947 (just two months before India's independence), Rushdie spent his youth in India and teenage years between England and his homeland. Although most infamous for his period of exile and years in hiding after being condemned to death by the Ayatollah Khomeini for the alleged blasphemy of Islam in his fourth novel -*The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie is considered one of today's most important writers of world literature. His literature, although heavily Anglicized due to his migration to England at the age of twenty-seven, is dominated by themes of identity that break down colonial constructs of Western dominance over Eastern culture, hence his position as a prominent Anglo-Indian postcolonial writer. Postcolonial discourse was born in response to the imperial expansion of Western colonial empires during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Postcolonial writers like Rushdie, therefore, emerged out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by writing in response

to the authority wielded by the imperial powers, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centers. It is thought that although influenced by his migration to England, Rushdie's work subverts Western-colonial constructs of identity and culture through specific postcolonial literary techniques such as fragmentation, plurality, and language.

For Saleem, born at the instant of India's independence from Britain, life becomes inextricably linked with the political, national, and religious events of his time; his life parallels that of postcolonial India. Due to the coincidental hour of his birth, Saleem is able to telepathically communicate with other gifted children born during the same hour of India's independence. Rushdie is relating Saleem's generation of "midnight's children" to the generation of Indians with whom he was born and raised. As a product of postcolonial India, Saleem must piece together the multifarious fragments of his identity, just as India must once more reinvest themselves in rebuilding their identity in the wake of colonialism. His story represents the plural identities of India and the fragmented search for self through memory, however erroneous they may be.

Skilfully and deftly employing 'magic realism' and interweaving metaphors in and out of each other on every page, Salman Rushdie very perfectly demarcates post-colonial India's disturbed endeavour at fashioning a national consciousness immediately after achieving their Independence from Great Britain. He very subtly tries to distinguish the collective excitement and nationalistic sentiments experienced by the population of India as the day of their Independence grew near.

Fury by Salman Rushdie : A 'Self' in exile

Salman Rushdie has emerged over the years as one of the most controversial figures of our times who manages to bring to the fore all kinds of contrary feelings. But whether admired or criticized, the fact remains that Rushdie, with his commitment to struggle for freedom of expression, for speech to the silenced, for power to the disempowered, is a writer who cannot be ignored.

One of the major preoccupations of Rushdie's literary articulations is the issue of migrant identity. Many of his characters are migrants drifting from shore to shore in search of some imaginary homeland and obviously the author identifies himself with his migrant personae. Search for identity is perhaps the one recurring theme in Rushdie's works, and the themes of double identity, divided selves and shadow figures persist in his writings as correlative for the schismatic/dual identity of the migrant, as well as the necessary confusion and ambiguity of the migrant existence. Rushdie describes the world from this unique point of view of the migrant narrator. He is also conscious of his role in this regard in re-describing the world, and thus creating a new vision of art and life.

In "Imaginary Homelands" (1991), Rushdie writes, "It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me to be self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal." (12). In this light, I believe

what Rushdie is trying to say is that we all perceive our pain and loss in the same way but our expressions will necessarily be diverse and will be our language. The sense of discontinuity is felt acutely when writers write from a foreign land. Even though the writers write on subjects which are understood universally, there will still be some form of misunderstanding as to how the thoughts are perceived.

In Rushdie's 8th novel, *Fury* (2001), Malik Solanka, the protagonist had made up back-stories for each of the dolls he has made. He says, "If a doll has no back-story, its market value was low. And as with dolls so with human beings. This was what we brought with us on our journey across oceans, beyond frontiers, through life: our little storehouse of anecdote and what-happened-next, our private once-upon-a-time. We were our stories and when we died, if we were very lucky, our immortality would be in another such tale." Yet, Solanka vehemently thinks, "It was precisely his back-story he wanted to destroy." He wanted to become part of a huge crowd where seemingly all will be equal and be clothed "in America's powerful unknowing."

Mysteries drive us all," Salman Rushdie writes in *Fury*. "We only glimpse their veiled faces, but their power pushes us onward, toward darkness. Or into the light." All of us--college professors, Wall Street investors, cab drivers--live in a dark, Freudian world, and we are each of us, Rushdie argues, struggling desperately to deny our own furious animal selves.⁶

Salman Rushdie is the pioneer of postcolonial literature. He is a diaspora writer who always mingles between two cultures- English and Indian. As he says in *Shame* (1983), "I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England where I live, and

⁶ This was downloaded as an e book. Therefore, I could not provide page numbers. Site is provided at the end.

Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will)." It is indeed a fact that postcolonial writers can have a "double vision" as they belong to the inside wherever they focus and also possess a level of objectivity since they essentially belong to the culture from which they are distanced. Salman Rushdie belongs to that genre of writers whom we called Expatriate writers or Immigrant writers. Expatriation brings with its many advantages and disadvantages. As Rushdie says in *Shame*, sometimes expatriates "straddle two cultures" while at other times, they "fall between two stools".

Salman Rushdie is an Indian who has been brought up in Bombay and migrated to Britain. His work is exhausting, energetic, culturally kaleidoscopic and his formally imaginative literary style, which expresses something of hybridizing experiences as a migrant writer who moves between cultures, continents and languages with an ease that is only experienced when a reader internalises his writings and is taken on a whirlwind of the same tumultuous familiarity the writer himself has gone through. Salman Rushdie is probably the purest example of a negative liberty - literally homeless, he writes repeatedly about the actual and figurative centrifuges of modern life. In Chapter 3 of *Fury*, Rushdie writes:

Life is fury. Fury-sexual, Oedipal, political, magical, brutal -- drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths. This is what we are, what we civilize ourselves to disguise the terrifying human animal in us, the exalted, transcendent, self-destructive, untrammelled lord of creation. We raise each other to the heights of joy. We tear each other limb from bloody limb.

Malik Solanka, an academic, a historian of ideas and a dollmaker, steps out of his life one day, abandons his wife and child without a word of explanation, and flees London for New York. There is fury within him, which sometimes explodes to a point which seems to threaten himself and he fears he has become dangerous to those he loves. He arrives in New York at a

time of unprecedented plenty, in the highest hour of America's wealth and power, seeking to "erase" himself. "Eat me, America, he prays, and give me peace".

Yet he is surrounded by fury, the same fury which he hoped to erase from his being when he left his family. Cabdrivers use utterly foul language and spew expletives. A section of the society is in thoroughly in terror as a serial killer is murdering women with a lump of concrete. The petty altercations and bone-deep resentments of the metropolis engulf him. He finds himself totally immersed in the same state of rage that is coursing through his veins. It is difficult for him to settle down in a place where nothing stops for a moment, where a person cannot hope to find a lull in the tumultuous cacophony of cosmopolitan city. New York can never be a place where one goes to find peace and tranquility. Perhaps the city was the place where a person like Solanka thought he should go as an escape, in order to assuage his guilt feelings or put his inner demons to sleep. The literary style of Rushdie may scare and offend some readers yet, there is an amazing quality to it. It gives us a feeling that we are on an extremely fast roller-coaster and there is no one to turn off the switch to make it stop. It has a kaleidoscopic variety to it. Only difference is, the scenes being shown to us are repugnant, morbid and utterly nauseating.

As Salman Rushdie rants and raves about capitalism, commercialist societies and mindless routines in this novel, Solanka mindlessly travels the city streets where he could not remember the exact route he takes. But "...he could remember the sheer volume of white and coloured noise. He could remember the noise dancing in abstract shapes before his red-rimmed eyes." A man who feared himself and it seemed he was waiting for something to explode inside him. As Rushdie writes about Solanka's forays into the world of love, about his pet hobby and about his relationship with his estranged wife and son, he seems to have put him on a precarious edge of his own 'self'. Solanka abhorred everything around him even

though he had come to the land of plenty to immerse himself in its multi-dimensional cultural scene, he cannot be wholly comfortable, neither can he start a new life because the voices from the past keep on bothering him. His past life with a pedophilic step-father and ineffectual mother has scarred him for any relationship in his life.

"All around him the American self was reconceiving itself in mechanical terms, but was everywhere running out of control." Solanka blames the government, the people, the media for the abysmal state that he has been thrown into. He seems to be in a schizophrenic state of being where he himself no longer understands who he is. His mind is "rudderless" on a sea of virtual reality of a mechanical cosmopolitan city's lust, greed and viciousness. Solanka furiously says "Who can hear one's own furious inner voices in that outward cacophony?" Yet, he keeps on hearing them and they leave him helpless in a situation which is running out of control.

The fury which Rushdie analyses is universal in the year 2000 - flavour of the millennium. "These days the goddesses, less regarded, were hungrier, wilder, casting their nets more widely. As the bonds of family weakened, so the Furies began to intervene in all of human life." Weaving through its main plot, *Fury* has quite a few subplots. There are references to grisly murders as mentioned earlier. Solanka, in his disoriented space of mind thinks he might have committed those murders in a drunken stupor. Mila Milo, an incest victim and a young Internet entrepreneur, seduces Solanka and then creates a new line of Little Brain dolls apparently stealing the idea from him. The dolls supposedly embody the contemporary obsession with celebrity and are a huge commercial success. Another beautiful woman, Neela Mahendra, whose beauty causes chaos around her, fall in love with Solanka. She is committed to her own little political cause- the Lilliput-Blefuscu national liberation movement. Solanka visits the island and is kidnapped by the insurgents. Mahendra intervenes

to secure his release but she is killed in the process. Solanka returns to the New York somehow calmed by her martyr-like devotion to the cause and to him.

Finally, as Solanka watches his son playing in a park, he wonders whether his demons have been exorcised. He jumps on to a bouncy castle and starts bouncing. He attracts his son's eyes and in that moment when Solanka is airborne, he says to his son, Asmaan, "Look at me, Asmaan! I'm bouncing very well! I'm bouncing higher and higher!" A reader may assume at this point that Solanka has let go of his last vestiges of self-respect in order to appear normal in his son's eyes. He falls short in the effort and it is with great pain that we perceive that he will never be normal again. Though the novel does not say clearly, but one can presume that his mental condition has stabilised to some extent for a very short period of time. Many readers may be quite fearful to think what could be the other alternative to this sort of an ending.

Fury is a work of explosive energy, a heart-rending and pitiless narration interspersed with pitch-black comedy, a profoundly disturbing inquiry into the darkest side of human nature, and also a love story of mesmerizing force. It is also an astonishing portrait of New York. Not since the Bombay of *Midnight's Children* have a time and place been so intensely and accurately captured in a novel. In his eighth novel, Salman Rushdie brilliantly entwines moments of anger and frenzy with those of humor, honesty, and intimacy. *Fury* is, above all, a masterly chronicle of the human condition in its multidimensional form.

Effects of Rushdie's writing on present writers of Indian origin:

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has changed the facet of Indian English Literature since the 1980's. This novel plays an important role in the reversal of 'centre- periphery' paradigm in English literary culture. Rushdie's example, his inventiveness, his irreverence, his audacity, and above all his success-has been liberating for a large group of Indian writers living either

at home or abroad. Rushdie belongs to the groups of novelists which we often called as third world cosmopolitans who are globally visible, whom the reviewers in New York and London hail as interpreters and authentic voices of the 'Third World'. The ability of Rushdie's texts to draw on both Eastern and Western cultural traditions, as well as his cultural hybridity as a Muslim from India who has lived most of his life and done his writing in Great Britain – this is appealing to postcolonial critics. However, this is also controversial as many Indian critics have rejected his work as non-representative of Indian literature because Rushdie's work is firmly rooted in Western literary traditions.

As a conclusion, we can say that it is through the works of Salman Rushdie that the Indian English writers of the eighties have found a new freedom of both form and content. New writers have found his acknowledgement of multiplicity and his hybridity of language particularly liberating. It enables them to tell their personal stories in their own voices as national epics.

Chapter -2

In Search of Home and Belonging: An exploration of V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival*

Almost the same but not quite.

“To be true to oneself in borrowed robes; this was the core dilemma of the colonial nationalist, most particularly of the colonized native. The full dimensions of the question of self-articulation become clear when we consider that not only the language and literary traditions transmitted by a colonial education were British, but also the institutions and political ideologies through which autonomy was asserted were derived in part from European research and European templates”(Boehmer, 110)

To emulate the colonizer, any colonized individual eventually falls short of being true to the self it is in the process of emulating. Naipaul's characters in *The Mimic Men* are in a constant state of flux and disorientation. These men who are trying to set up a new world are finding it extremely difficult to loosen the yoke of colonialism from around their shoulders. They are like shifty images on flowing water, trying desperately to emulate their colonial masters but thinking at the same time, that they have become their own masters. In an effort to forever weigh themselves against their former perpetrators, they keep falling short in their own estimation. In this novel, where Naipaul masterfully weaves pathos and a sense of alienation of the colonial being into a search for the self, the dilemma experienced by such an entity is felt very strongly.

“Between the desire

And the spasm

Between the potency

And the existence
 Between the essence
 And the descent
 Falls the shadow”

In *The Hollow Men*, T. S. Eliot had written about men who had survived the ravages of war and were fighting to get their grips back on a normal living, yet falling short even of a glorious death. We find similar veins of the same struggle in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* when we find Ralph Singh, the protagonist, trying to come to terms with his in-between state in which he is when he arrives in the capital of a British Empire which has been wounded by the horrors of war and whose glorious sun has already begun to set. Naipaul's protagonist is a survivor of the colonial era and he faces the problem of being utterly unable to create an original identity. He is caught between helplessly imitating the coloniser in an attempt at originality, or returning to the roles that colonisation has imposed on people like him. It is in London where he gains an awareness of himself as someone trapped in a position of dependence on the imperial country for his identity. Yet, this awareness has also become his undoing. He cannot become what he aspires to be nor can he completely divest himself of his old skin, a skin which houses his colonized entity.

The Mimic Men presents the constraints of a decolonized country in the Caribbean island of Isabella. The previous state has now become independent but the formerly colonised people of the island are unable to establish order and govern their country. Since they are far away from their original native soil, their own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to them and they cannot even associate with the coloniser because of the difference in terms of culture, tradition, race and religion. As a result, they replicate and echo the coloniser's life styles, values, and views. In an account which presents a severe collision

of culture, the novel considers the relationship between the socio-political and the psychological consequences of imperialism. When we examine Ralph's sense of alienation, his experiences as a politician, his struggle with a sense of personal identity, and his inability to connect with others, we will find the links with his sense of loss and disconnectedness. These experiences and reactions also fit into general patterns of colonized persons acting within 'typical' colonial situations.

Ralph Singh who is actually Ranjit Kripalsingh, lives in exile in a private hotel in Kensington High Street area in London. He felt the need to change his name and take on a borrowed identity in order to live his life in this bustling metropolis. It is a weirdly lonely life, he does not meet too many people, we never find out what college he is studying, we only get snippets of his dealings with his immediate surroundings where he likes to be known as a "Dandy". He writes about his childhood and adulthood, his life in Isabella and in England, his political career and marriage, and his education to give shape to the past and his experiences, and to understand himself. He feels that writing his memoirs may free him of his inadequacies and the yoke of colonial servitude. He seeks solace in writing his memoirs and tries to reconstruct his identity and impose order on his life as the place in which he is born is associated with disorder. Thus, writing becomes an approach of releasing himself from the pain of being a displaced colonial citizen. Ultimately, through the presentation of the events, he is able to take control of the wreckage of his past and shape them into a spiritual and emotional autobiography, by writing.

However, the irony is that in search of order, Singh is incapable of following a sequence in imposing order on his writing. The constant shifts between the past, the present, and the future somewhat reflect Singh's mental disturbances. The novel outlays Singh's desire to find

out the worth of a colonial subject in a postcolonial society. We learn how colonial experiences have affected and shaped his life and personality.

Singh's early thoughts on leadership are expressed as follows.

A man was only what he saw of himself in others, and an intimation came to me of chieftainship in that island. This was my political awakening. This might be said to have been my first political lesson. (*The Mimic Men*, 121)

Singh says that he and his friends on that island pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing themselves for life, that they were the mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. Singh presents London or the illusion of London as a city of "magical light" He comes to London three times once as a student, then as a politician, and later as an exile. Each time, he makes the repeated effort to experience the magic of the city that he paradoxically knows does not actually exist. He climbs the attic to his landlord's room after his demise and looks out at the city which had been his refuge and muses to himself. "Yet what was I to do with so complete a beauty? And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it."⁷(9) Even after his initial disillusionment, the young Singh continues to tell himself that London's heart is somewhere else. Yet he thinks that the god of the city was elusive. Even as an exile, he refuses to give up, spending the first part of his stay touring the English countryside this time in search of tranquil gardens, flowers, birds and natural beauty in general. He is disillusioned in finding a cacophony of noise, highways, crowded

⁷ Naipaul, V. S. *The Mimic Men*, Andre Deutsch Limited, 1967

hotels, and squalid surroundings instead. The ordinariness of England's reality simply fails to meet his expectations of it.

Yet, the solitary and obscure life that he sees as a withdrawal from London is only made possible by London. The impersonal and compartmentalised urban existence where each individual returns at the end of the day to his own limited space gives a feeling of finality of having arrived at one's desired end. Singh feels that they are all singular units in a place which erases all sorts of individuality. In the absence of possible originality and self-created identity, the best alternative becomes the worship of stone-idols carved by one's own hands. The self-consciously deluded belief in independence and freedom allows one to become, if not the author of one's circumstances, the author of one's self-delusion.

“What I have called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as fanon has observed, ..the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-sesteeem. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask:...The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discoursealso disrupts its authority. And it is double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognitionof the colonial object.⁸(Bhaba, *The Locations of Culture*, 88). Singh feels that being in the shoes of a white man can elevate his esteem to the point where he can once again respect himself and stop seeking the elusive identity of a man who needs to leave his roots to find his beginnings.

To sum up, the socio-cultural circumstances and contradictory affiliations of his childhood have led Singh to a state of uncertainty and disorder, which prevents him from assimilating to

⁸ Bhaba, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994

his surroundings. The influences coming from London and from the descriptions of a glorious origin in Asia are stronger than anything the chaotic island without history can offer, and Singh is torn between them. He appears detached from his actual circumstances and lives in a fantasy which causes him to become incapable of real action. As he grows older, the fantasies about belonging to London prove to be false, and his confusion increases as he realizes he is doubly excluded; excluded both from the life on Isabella and from that in London. He feels he has lived through attachment and freed himself from one cycle of events. He has also fulfilled the fourfold division of life prescribed by his Aryan ancestors. He says, "I have been student, householder and a man of affairs, recluse."⁹ (300). He does not belong anywhere, but is passively adopting false roles he thinks others expect of him. There appears to be no connection between himself and his deeds, rather he appears to be an objective observer of his own involuntary actions.

"The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." V. S. Naipaul's observation at the beginning of *The Bend in the River* aptly sums up the state of "being" of all his "Mimic Men".

In Search of Home and Belonging.

A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing....

I felt that my presence in that old valley was part of something like an upheaval, a change in the course of history of the country.

The Enigma of Arrival, 1987

⁹ Naipaul, V. S. *The Mimic Men*, Andre Deutsch Limited, 1967

Although it is called a novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* stretches the line between fiction and autobiography nearly to the vanishing point. The unnamed narrator is a writer in his mid-50s, an Indian and a Hindu, born in Trinidad, educated at Oxford, who has travelled extensively and lived most of his adult life in England. This person, in other words, is indistinguishable from V.S. Naipaul and the personality, the tone of voice and cast of mind displayed here resemble the prose of Naipaul's nonfiction more closely than that of his other nine novels, including *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River*. Whether *The Enigma of Arrival* is literally true or an invention does not particularly matter. I feel readers who expect a work of pure narrative will be pleasantly surprised at the underlying pathos of the writer and his longing for a place to which to belong completely.

Naipaul's 19th book yields its pleasures slowly. Its plot is essentially the passage of ten years, during which the writer lives in a cottage on the grounds of a Victorian-Edwardian manor in a Wiltshire valley within easy walking distance of Stonehenge and Salisbury Plain. In the beginning he arrives; at the end he goes. In between, this narrator thinks occasionally about the first 18 years of his life in Trinidad, "my insecure past," and the scholarship that took him to Oxford and England - "the other man's country." He reveals nothing about his university experiences and alludes only briefly to the following 15 years he spent struggling to make his name as a writer. What engages, indeed mesmerizes, his attention is his sojourn in rural England. He feels that his life here is a gift and like a second, happier childhood as he feels very safe in the natural surroundings.

Much of the drama in the book stems from the tensions generated when a sensitive grown-up finds himself living in a fantasy of his youth.

"The solitude of the walk, the emptiness of that stretch of the downs, enabled me to surrender to my way of looking, to indulge my linguistic or historical fantasies; and enabled me, at the

same time, to shed the nerves of being a stranger in England.....and I had this historical part of England to myself when I went walking.”¹⁰(18)

In *The Enigma of Arrival*, V. S. Naipaul describes how a landed estate in southern England and its owner, with a colonial background and afflicted by a degenerative disease, goes into a decline before finally perishing. While describing his surroundings which still remained in very traditional settings, the writer manages to secure the attention of the readers completely as he takes them on a journey of his own attempt at finding his self.

The myths of the empire and the metropolis absorbed in V.S. Naipaul's colonial home country affected not only his expectations but also his perceptions of England and the city of London as he arrived there. His endeavour in depicting a picture of the process of decolonization of a colonial and post-colonial society in its utter starkness comes as a shock, as well as a revelation to the reader. Seeing through the eyes of Naipaul, a skilful artist, whose art finds fruition through his words, it is possible to construct a very graphic picture of the England he steps into at the very early age of eighteen. He shrugs off his colonial past and his Trinidadian-Hindu upbringing and arrives in a society where he could not find what he had imagined in his past. He feels let down at this point and says "...I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past; that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of the empire, which (like a provincial, from a far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy.”¹¹ (141)

The change perceived in the England or the city of London of his dreams, the dreams or fantasy that Dickens' novels had created inside him while he grew up, came as a shocking revelation to him. His need to get away from his colonial past lands him in London, primarily

¹⁰ Naipaul, V. S. *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York, Vintage Books, 1987

¹¹ Naipaul, V. S. *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York, Vintage Books, 1987

for an education for which he had made himself go through a very rigorous life-style, denying himself a lot of simple pleasures and joys of life. He had always been obsessed with his childhood fascination of Charles Dickens' literature and he believed firmly that it would give his own vocation a chance to flower in the city of London. The city apparently failed to mesmerize him as we find the writer settling later amidst the plains of Salisbury in the village of Wiltshire.

The narrator rented a cottage in the grounds of a manor and tried to settle down into his life as a man of words. His landlord, the owner of the manor had become a reclusive man, partly due to excesses in his young age and somewhat furthered by age and subsequent afflictions. The grandeur of the bygone times was evident in the surroundings of the manor and the writer was quite content in exploring the stateliness that was once attached to the place. Partly driven by fantasy and partly by his immense pleasure in all things traditional, he felt that he had come to a place where he could be on his own to explore his internal feelings by going on long walks around the valley and downs of Wiltshire. He felt an amazing kinship with the lord of the manor. "...it might be said that an empire lay between us. The empire at the same time linked us. The empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor."¹²(215)

His stay in the bustling metropolis of London may have shattered his fantasies to the extent that he felt he had to settle down in the quiet suburban landscapes of Wiltshire. He felt soothed by the yews, beeches and elms, the grassy walkways, the regular trips to nearby

¹² Naipaul, V. S. *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York, Vintage Books, 1987

Stonehenge and the sedate suburban life around him. The manor and its past history intrigued him, the accounts of his landlord's life as it once were from his neighbours were food for thought in his mind. The rustic countryside gave him a strange sense of belonging, a belonging he could not associate with his birthplace in Trinidad or his numerous journeys around the world which he had to undertake on account of his writings. At one point, certain behaviours of his landlord baffled him. He felt the need to question. "Was he agitated by the wish to put things right or by the idea of decay and lack of care? Did he see the ivy that was killing so many of the trees that had been planted with the garden?" (233) It was apparent that his landlord liked the ivy that grew all over the manor because he had..."given instructions that the ivy was never to be cut."¹³ (233)

In short, colonial writers, positioned between diametrically differing cultural worlds, were able to borrow from several traditions, yet, belonged to no one. In the face of their uneasy marginality or supplementarity, they would turn in time to what might be called their own- their own experience of environment, migration or invasion, as the case might be - to find a position for self-reconstruction.¹⁴ (Boehmer, 111)

As we go along this journey with him, V. S. Naipaul takes us on a sedentary trip through the traditional ways of living in an England which has seen the past glories slowly eroding to the demands of time and change. Even though the picture is rapidly changing and forced urbanization is taking place around him, we can feel the essence of this once magnificent way of living which the writer loved so much that he feels more at home here, among the strange neighbours, the hardworking farmers, the gardeners of the manor and the old landlord

¹³ Naipaul, V. S. *The Enigma of Arrival*, New York, Vintage Books, 1987

¹⁴ Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 2005

himself. It is almost as if he wants us to feel the texture of the landscape and the glorious era of the lost empire and feel closer to him as he internalizes his surroundings. Amid the decaying life of this quiet part of England, he feels very much at home and tries to settle down to a living which could give him peace of mind and body.

Chapter-3

Crises of dual identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel and short stories.

Jhumpa Lahiri's work is simple and effectual. Her style is fluid, her choice of words is very matter of fact and seems to mirror her day to day life. In an interview with Isaac Chotiner for *The Atlantic* in April 2008, Lahiri said:

I like it to be plain. It appeals to me more. There's form and there's function and I have never been a fan of just form. My husband and I always have this argument because we go shopping for furniture and he always looks at chairs that are spectacular and beautiful and unusual, and I never want to get a chair if it isn't comfortable. I don't want to sit around and have my language just be beautiful.

This is exactly what played through my mind as I went on a happy journey through her short stories and novel. The simplistic beauty of her language brought out the pain, joy and agonizing moments felt by the immigrants who were trying to fit into a culture and terrain totally unfamiliar to them. Even though Lahiri earned the prestigious Pulitzer in 2000 for her debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*- I will start my interpretations of her writing experience with *The Namesake* which was published in 2003. Lahiri's method of self-exploration is an appealing fact about her writing. Even though a bit of her personal experiences has been reflected in the writings under discussion, they do have some common elements running through them.

The migrant has become one of the emblematic figures of the contemporary world. Travelling and adapting across cultures have turned into major issues and concerns of the contemporary globalizing environment. Contemporary fiction attempts to offer possible

solutions to the more than evident crisis of communication between cultures. It is through literature that many of the contemporary writers come to terms with their immigrant condition, and find a voice of their own by making the two worlds they are forced to live in coexist harmoniously within their own often disturbed self. In an effort to understand the dilemmas, setbacks and experiences suffered by immigrants in their newly adopted homelands, I will discuss the short stories and a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. The books under discussion is the Pulitzer Prize winning short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, a novel *The Namesake* and a short story collection- *The Unaccustomed Earth*.

During an interview with Bookforum (April/May 2008) on Migration, Assimilation and Inebriation, Jhumpa Lahiri talks about the differences between the present generation children and their parents, while they live their lives in a culture foreign to their forefathers :

Some of the culture goes by the wayside, or the link is never made. I was aware of that myself when I had my kids. I really felt a sense that I was the end of a line, and that it was a very short line. I knew my parents had parents and so on, but to me, the universe was my parents and they were the far end and I was the near end. There were certain intensities to the experience of that first generation and their offspring that do not carry over. I'm very aware of my parents' experience, how I grew up and now how my children are growing up. There is such a stark difference in those two generations.

Lahiri's captivating novel takes the reader back in time, for much of the story is an examination of the tension between past and present. It is that tension between what was and what is, that drives the narration, colours the drama, and shapes the lives of the novel's characters.

The Namesake begins by recounting the emotional struggles of an Indian husband and wife trying to make a new life in America. Ashima Ganguli, the pregnant wife, grapples with an intense longing to be with her family and to share the experience of childbirth with her mother and father. Ashima's husband, Ashoke, meanwhile, wants to provide a better life for his new son by earning a doctorate degree from a prestigious American university. While both characters want to build a better life in America, their pasts play a strong role in fashioning who they are and what they will become.

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. ¹⁵(Michel Foucault, 1967)

The perspective of the 'moment' privileged in the above extract may indeed be very useful in the study of diasporic literature. The word 'diaspora' itself, coming, as it does, from Greek 'dia' ('through') and 'speirein' ('to scatter'), etymologically means 'dispersal,' and involves, at least two countries, two cultures, which are entrenched in the mind of the migrant, side-by-side. Although the past is invoked now and then, the focus is persistently on the 'moment.' The past is brought into play to indicate a certain contrast, which must be incorporated, and controlled in the present life in order to negotiate the network of social relations in the immediate world. The past, thus, becomes a part of the present consciousness of the diasporic

¹⁵ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces. Heterotopia" (1967) (trans. Jay Miskowiec).

Available: <http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia>.

subject. Literary works, written particularly by second generation diasporic writers, concentrate more on synchronic dimension than on diachronic one. It is quite natural that they approach the narratives from comparative perspectives, both from the points of view of cultures and generations.

The lived experience of the children of first generation migrants to which Jhumpa Lahiri belongs is characterized by their participation in the American mainstream culture available in the larger social space, outside the limited family space. This their parents often disapprove. They, in their turn, disapprove of their parents' proximity to the ancestral 'home' culture which the Indian American community tries to replicate in the new space. The family space and the community space, however, cannot remain pure as change of places inevitably brings along the concept of hybridization. The birth of children, which happens in the early part of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, introduces conflicting relationships in the family space. The largely homogenous culture in the family, as we observe in the novel, gives way to a heterogeneous one, leading to differences of opinion and a complex pattern of relationship.

We can see how an individual's life gets inevitably mixed up - and complicates further - with those of others in different spaces which lie in proximity to each other and contribute to his/her identity formation. The relationship between the second generation Indian Americans and the family and in extension to the community space in which they find themselves are always under the focus of all discussions on diaspora literature. The word 'space,' as may be evident, is used here in a theoretical sense and is differentiated from the word 'place.' The latter is used to refer to a geographical location, a territorial entity, while the former suggests a vigorous interactive network of relations.

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and nibbles at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. ¹⁶(Foucault, 1967)

Lahiri's characters in the novel also 'live inside a set of relations' and interact in a vigorous space. *The Namesake* is a narrative of how Ashoke's and Ashima's son Gogol Ganguli attains his identity and self-realization through his negotiation with different spaces. As he realizes, his own family space is very constricted – it in effect stifles his voice and destroys his freedom and agency. His anguish and antipathy grows out of this because it prevents his close and intimate interaction with the mainstream culture and tries to limit his cultural activities largely to Indian American community. As he understands, this is a sanctified space and his parents enforce its 'sacred' norms which they can relate to the absent 'home' country and not to the present social space. And therefore these norms, for Gogol and his generation, are largely irrelevant. So long as the parents, Ashima and Ashoke, were the two members in the family the purity of the norms could be somehow preserved to a certain extent. The birth of Gogol, however, brings in the first stage of discomfort for the Ganguli family. The hospital space becomes the first evident site of resistance to the family and community practice followed by the Bengalis. Ashima and Ashoke wait for a letter from her grandmother that will carry the name of the new-born baby, which will provide them with the sanction of the family. This is often followed as a norm. "Names can wait. In India parents take their time. It

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces. Heterotopia" (1967) (trans. Jay Miskowiec).

wasn't unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined" ¹⁷(25). But since the letter containing the name does not arrive and the baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate which must have a name, the Gangulis are evidently in a dilemma.

The attempt to rewrite the old culture in the new social space is confronted with an initial crisis as the American social space intervenes in the Indian American family space. Gogol, which was originally intended as a pet name for the boy, had to be ultimately accepted as an official name. This naming process is dealt with in a very uncomprehending way by the hospital staff as it is quite unusual for Americans to have two different names. In this connection, Lahiri deals elaborately with the Bengali custom of giving two names to a child – *bhalonam* (literally, 'good name;' or formal name) and *daknam* (meaning 'pet name'; literally 'name by which one is called'). The former is to be used in the public space: "Every pet name is paired with a good name, a *bhalonam*, for identification in the outside world. Consequently good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places" ¹⁸(26). The latter is used in the family space and in the association of close friends and associates. "Pet names are persistent remnants of childhood [...] these are the names by which they are known in their respective families, the names by which they are adored and scolded and missed and loved" ¹⁹(26). In the diasporic space the affection and love associated with the *daknam* is hankered after by the first generation Indian Americans because the larger family in the Indian sense is not available. The community back home has a close network of intimate relationship which is often indicated by the large scale use of the *daknam*. In such a situation community relationship is privileged and individualism, which is

¹⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

¹⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

¹⁹ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

celebrated in the West, is made subservient to that. The West has always advocated the concept of individualism, as it is believed that an individual can enhance his/her dreams and ideals through it. Whereas, the people of the Indian sub-continent have always understood that they can only flourish if they pursue their individual dreams in a manner which is chalked out by their families.

Generational differences are thus projected through unions of the two social spaces. For the first generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima the change of geographical location is the first shock. Ashima, for instance, encounters, after her arrival in the USA, the differences in the landscape – “heaps of broken snow glowing like shattered, bluish white bricks on the ground.”²⁰(30). She realizes the intensity of the loss of the family and community support that she has left behind when she steps outside her new home briefly and feels the “...the frigid New England chill piercing her inner ears and jaw,...leafless trees with ice covered branches and not a soul on the street” (30). On the basis of her experience for the eighteen months in the country she knows that it will be difficult for her to bring up her child in “this lonely country.” Her pregnancy in the new space is important for more than one reason. First of all, it signals the entry of a member of the second generation who will represent a hybrid generation. He will resent his parents’ culture and dislike his name *Gogol* that will sound unfamiliar to others in the public spaces like school and college. Nevertheless it will lead to the formation of a new unit. It will be a family like that of Alan and Judy and their daughters whose house they rented. Secondly, travails of the birth metaphorically represent the travails she undergoes for the process of the birth of a self that can cope with the new American space, absorbing the shocks in her journey for acculturation that will at one stage make her join a library where she takes a part time job. The acculturation process is a long-drawn one,

²⁰ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

a process involving new knowledge formation against the overwhelming backdrop of memory of the recent past, of the old culture and families and community. This knowledge includes trivial things like “Americans eat their chicken in its skin” ²¹(5) to the vital like how to raise children in a lonely country without the help of family members. Thirdly, Ashima associates the pregnancy with her own condition of being a ‘foreigner’:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. ²²(49-50)

Between 1968 and 2000, Ashoke and Ashima make some progress regarding their relation with the U.S. but they mainly have not been able to move beyond the Indian frame of mind. While at Cambridge they (particularly Ashima) were neophytes, unable to settle down mentally. When they moved to the small university town outside Boston, Ashoke was particularly adding to the academic space and through it to the national space. He got a new office “with his name etched onto a strip of black plastic by the door” (48) and his name was printed under “Faculty” in the university directory. These are in a way official affirmation of one who in a certain way belongs. One way of finding connectedness is to purchase a house which becomes a symbol of belonging. Gangulis too purchased a house at the Pemberton Road in a white neighborhood with residents like the Johnsons, the Mertons, the Aspris, and the Hills which is an indication of their acceptance in the secular civil space:

²¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

²² Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

In the end they decide on a shingled two-story colonial in a recently built development, a house previously occupied by no one, erected on a quarter acre of land. This is a small patch of America to which they lay claim.²³ (Lahiri, 51)

In the meantime, their ties with the ancestral land begin to weaken: "...their lives in New England swell with fellow Bengali friends, the numbers of that other, former life, those who know Ashima and Ashoke not by their good names but as Monu and Mithu, slowly dwindle" (63). They are therefore forced by the circumstances of their lives to distance themselves from the endearing, filial relations and community back 'home.' They slowly but surely allow themselves to move towards a hybrid cultural location:

They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (64)

Towards the end of the novel Ashima's change has been summarized in the following way:

She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. In her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driver's license, her social security card. (276).

²³ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, New Delhi, India: Harper Perennial, 2006

It is, therefore, a long journey for people like Ashima who encounter difficulties in different spaces and undergo transformation of identities. With such progress in attitude the stranglehold on the children is slackened and Gogol and Sonia as individuals in the family space feel much more integrated to the family unit.

Gogol's journey is less disintegrating and at the end we find him moving towards his family. He realizes that his own identity is intricately linked up with the history of his family. Right from his early days he too has been rebellious. In 'legal rites of passage' he changes his name from Gogol to *Nikhil* which is in fact a manifestation of his protest. In the New Haven campus he is happy that nobody calls him Gogol. With the new name becoming familiar, "it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas" (105). In acts of defiance, he loses his virginity at a party. He has a short affair with a white girl called Ruth. His life at the dormitory at New Haven is one of throwing cultural norms to the wind. This dormitory may be called, following Foucault again, 'crisis heterotopia' (usually prevalent in so-called primitive society), which is described as "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, the elderly etc." (Foucault, 1967). He says that boarding school in its nineteenth century form is one of the remnants of these fast disappearing heterotopias. This is the site of first manifestations of sexual virility which were supposed to take place 'elsewhere' rather than at 'home.' The first manifestations of Gogol's agency were found in a similar place because he was away from home. He could live in the dorm in any way he liked. This is a site from which he can operate safely even in sexual matters without any interference from his family. Later he has a more durable affair with Maxine, another well-to-do white girl, but somehow he has been drawn towards his origin, somehow "he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own" (Lahiri, 141).

Two specific events make his feeling for the family apparent. One is the revelation of the secret of his father's accident in India with which his name is intimately linked up, while the other is his father's death. He learns that there is an episode behind his own naming. A book by Nikolai Gogol saved his father's life in a train accident in India. The rescuers noticed the book falling from Ashoke's hand. This revelation which was only known to his mother and nobody in America knew about this, brought about a change in the son's attitude to his father:

Gogol listens, stunned, his eyes fixed on his father's profile. Though there are inches between them, for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know.(..) Against instinct he tries to imagine life without his father, a world in which his father does not exist.

(Lahiri 123)

His father's death is a shock to him and he wants to remember his father in moments of privacy and only in the sanctity of his memory. Although Maxine offers to accompany her after he receives the news, he does not accept her offer. "He doesn't want to be with someone who barely knew his father, who's met him only once" (Lahiri, 170). They go through the Hindu rites in the household and they silently feel "they are alone, isolated, as a family" (181). After some days Maxine proposes that a visit to New Hampshire together; "to get away from all this" will do him good. Gogol turns down the offer, asserting that he does not want to get away (182). Gogol thus begins to understand his father better. His father's sudden death affects him profoundly as he learns to connect with him and his past. It seems that his father's death gives him a new understanding of community and the place of an individual in a community. This profound grief somehow unites him to his roots and in a very unconscious way he accepts the customs and rituals of his forefathers and gives him a new understanding of his parents' adjustment pains in a foreign land.

For Gogol, the journey to understanding is longer. Maybe he will be better equipped to handle his new space along with the experiences of his ancestors because he has gained the maturity to absorb the future- however difficult that may be. The larger social space in the United States of America which needs to be travelled by him and others like him may only be understood when they have stopped rebelling against their norms initiated in their familial space. Despite his hate for his name and despite his adoption of a new name, he fails to “reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name” (287). That is why he finds himself opening the pages of a book authored by Nikolai Gogol, a book that his father had once given to him and he had left unread and forgotten in his dusty bookshelf.

On Defining Diaspora

Before analyzing the experiences and maladies of the diasporas presented in Lahiri’ s novel, an attempt is being made here to define the term ‘diaspora’ the related crisis of dual identity and various hazards experienced by them in the process of settlement in the new country-- their cultural dilemmas and displacement; the generational differences; transformation in their identities with the new demands; and the new possibilities and new ways of thinking. The word, ‘diaspora’ has been taken from the Greek, meaning ‘to disperse.’ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define ‘diaspora’ as ‘the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions.....’ ²⁴(Ashcroft, 61).

Diasporas thus live in one country as community but look across time and space to another. The migrant diasporas and their descendents experience displacement, fragmentation, marginalization and discontinuity in the cultural discourse of the subject countries.

²⁴ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis group, Second Edition, 2007.

This living 'in-between' condition is very painful and marginalizing for the diasporas. There is yearning for 'home', to go back to 'the lost origin' and 'imaginary homelands' (Rushdie, 9-21) are created from the fragmentary and partial memories of the homelands. They face cultural dilemma when their cultural practices are mocked at and there is a threat to their ethnic and cultural identity. They stand bewildered and confused, nostalgic and homesick and show resistance also to the discourse of power in various forms. In the following generations these confusions, problems and yearnings become less intense as they get influenced by the culture of that country and also adapt themselves to it.

The identities of diaspora individuals and communities can neither be placed only in relation to some homeland to which they all long to return nor to that country alone where they settle down in. They, by all means, face the crisis of hybrid or dual identity, which makes their existence all the more difficult. This is an experience universal to all Indian diaspora, irrespective of their caste, region and religion.

Negotiations between cultures and personal space.

When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life. My first book was published in 1999, and around then, on the cusp of a new century, the term "Indian-American" has become part of this country's vocabulary. I've heard it so often that these days, if asked about my background, I use the term myself, pleasantly surprised that I do not have to explain further. What a

difference from my early life, when there was no such way to describe me, when the most I could do was to clumsily and ineffectually explain. ²⁵(J. Lahiri, *My Two Lives*)

When reading Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories for the first time, one finds that they seem to offer an image of the complicated cultural relationships between India and the West, exploring the troubled position of the displaced individual caught between two cultures which, in most cases, he or she finds unfamiliar. On a second, more in-depth reading, all the stories give evidence of journeys across visible and invisible frontiers that the characters must cross over in order to find their real self. As the writer has herself said in the abovementioned article in *The Newsweek*, it was the intense drive to have a convergence of two different lives come to a common meeting point that made her express her desires on the pages of her stories. These stories became the outpouring of a soul who needed others to validate her existence in the world where the fluidity of dual experiences was lived to the full. Maybe Lahiri's artistic intentions were to remove the seal of 'marginality' from her writing and give the readers an alternative to reading literature from a stereotypical standpoint.

Out of the nine stories in *The Interpreter of Maladies*, three are set in India, while six are set in America, focusing on the lives of first or second generation Americans of Indian origin. Yet, apart from the setting of some of the stories and the clearly indicated origin of the protagonists of some other, Lahiri's collection seems to resist the stereotypes of Indianness and the clichés associated with the inevitable clash between the East and the West. The writer is more inclined to do away with prejudice and go beyond the stereotypical images that in most cases underlie and undermine these relationships. The encounter between the East and

²⁵ <<http://www.newsweek.com/2006/03/05/my-two-lives.html>>

the West, the migration of individuals across national frontiers is nothing but a ruse for Lahiri to probe deep into the difficulties generated by the encounter between the self and the Other. She is without question always interested in looking into the condition of the troubled modern self and more importantly, to investigate human nature. In this respect, Jhumpa Lahiri's writings develop along lines characteristic for most contemporary fiction, equally interested in the essence of the individual consciousness and in the self which serves as the converging point of various cultural forces, considering both the private and the public spaces they inhabit. The way their interaction takes place and how they influence each other are major focal points in her writing as they give a very unique insight into the characters' selves, whether troubled or not.

It is no longer and only the clash between national cultures that represents the writer's main interest, although some of Lahiri's protagonists do seem to conform to the typical image of the contemporary migrant, the individual who has been torn from his roots and given a completely new culture and language and they are obliged to learn, adapt and mingle into the ways of their new community. It is through assimilation only that a new identity can be formed having some of the old ways and getting into the skin of a newer persona who can get out of the mold of the "typical migrant".

It is the case of the protagonist of *The Third and Final Continent* who looks at himself from the very beginning as the typical migrant.

I left India in 1964, with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent, in those days, of ten dollars to my name. [...] I lived in north London, in Finsbury Park, in a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like myself, [...] all struggling to educate and establish ourselves abroad. (Lahiri, 173)

It is also the case of Mrs. Sen in '*Mrs. Sen's*' or Shoba and Shukumar in '*A Temporary Matter*'. Lahiri's attempt is to see beyond the visible frontiers and to plunge deeper into the

springs of human action is the reason as to why she frequently deals with problematic relationships between individuals within one and the same society, be it American or Indian. Many of her stories treat marriage and the tense relationships within couples. "*This Blessed House*" focuses on the troubled relationships within the couple.

"At the urging of their matchmakers, (Sanjeev and Twinkle) married in India, amid hundreds of well-wishers" (143) just to realize soon how different they are and how lonely they felt.

Miranda, the protagonist of "Sexy" also feels insecure in the relationship she has with a married man, the story being about her becoming aware of her displacement and loneliness.

"*A Temporary Matter*" is about a estranged couple gradually drifting away from each other after the death of their child and how they "become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible" (4).

"*A Temporary Matter*" is fully set in America, but Shoba and Shukumar are of Indian origin. The story is far from analyzing their inability to adapt to a hostile cultural environment. It rather focuses on the deteriorating relationships between a husband and a wife after the death of their child and, although the two would be expected to stick together given the tragic incident and the threatening cultural environment, the walls separating the young couple become even thicker in spite of their common origin. They find it impossible to communicate and get estranged to the point of separating.

"*A Real Durwan*" is set in India and features only characters whose origin is not commented on since they are natives in their own country. The protagonist of the story is a sixty-year-old woman, deported to Calcutta as a result of the Partition, whose problems of adaptability to a new culture are brought to the fore. "No one doubted she was a refugee; the accent in her Bengali made that clear" (72), which is why she is always inclined "to exaggerate her past at such elaborate lengths and heights" (73) in order to protect herself against the aggressiveness of the new cultural environment. From the point of view of the Westerner inclined to

prejudice and stereotyping, the story might be read as focusing on the cruelty of the Indians and their indifference to the Other, since Boori Ma, accused of theft by those whom she had served for years in exchange for a shelter, is cruelly thrown into the street. Yet, if one forgets that the story's setting is Calcutta, one realizes that the story is about failed human relationships, about indifference and cruelty caused by poverty.

Out of the nine stories, one seems to have a more highlighted political content, in the sense that, because of an explicit reference to the Bangladeshi war of independence in 1971, the reader is tempted to see it as dealing with contemporary political issues. Mr. Pirzada came from Dacca, now the capital of Bangladesh, but then in 1971, a part of Pakistan. That year Pakistan was engaged in civil war. The eastern frontier, where Dacca was located, was fighting for independence from the ruling regime in the west. (23) The story, however, narrated from the point of view of the child Lilia, definitely resists politicizing, bringing to the fore issues related to identity and intercultural communication. It is the child's way of perceiving the world and her consciousness that represents the story's main interest. Lilia is the one whose initiation depends on her becoming aware of the difference between the self and the other across the visible and the invisible frontiers.

"Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, (...) drank no alcohol (...) Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk. (...) "Mr. Pirzada is Bengali, but he is Muslim," my father informed me. "Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India." (26)

It is not so much the visible frontiers that the writer seems to be obsessed with as the invisible ones that do tend to keep people apart. The individual in Lahiri's stories is not simply Indian or American, Indian in America, or Indian in India, or American of Indian origin in India but a curious mixture so of many backgrounds.

The cultural clash is central to Lahiri's stories. Its treatment is not limited, however, to the encounter between India and America, but the clash can occur on both sides of the frontier. "*Interpreter of Maladies*", the collection's title story, deals with the encounter between an Indian cabdriver and tour guide, also a linguist, Mr. Kapasi and an Indian American family touring India. The Dases are perceived by Mr. Kapasi from the start as foreigners as they "looked Indian, but dressed as foreigners did" (44). During their first encounter, Mr. Das has an air of confidence given by the fact that "Mina and I were both born in America" (45). The Das family cannot be mistaken for Indian, although they do look so. They are and behave in a very American way. Mr. Das cannot do without his tour book, which provides the information he thinks he needs to acquire knowledge of India. What stirs his curiosity is the exoticism of the people and places in India. The Das family's encounter with India is an example of failed intercultural communication. Mr. and Mrs. Das do not try to recover a sense of belonging, rather they are keen on reasserting their identity as Americans. Yet, during the trip they take to the Sun Temple in Konarak, Mr. Kapasi feels he identifies with Mrs. Das. He sees in her the same unhappiness he felt about his own marriage. "The signs he recognized from his own marriage were there – the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences" (53). But communication is hindered again, as Mr. Kapasi was looking for a friend, while Mrs. Das was looking for someone to "interpret her common, trivial little secret," (66) which is why he felt deeply insulted. Mrs. Das misinterpreted 'the interpreter of maladies.' She wanted some remedy to cure her consciousness, expecting to feel better and relieved. Mr. Kapasi wanted instead to "fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations." (59)

The subject matter of the stories makes it somewhat rather difficult to find a common denominator to keep the collection together. Apparently, the only binding element is Indianness. But to say that Lahiri's main concern is the status of the Indian immigrant in

America, or at best, the precarious condition of the Indians in India would mean to oversimplify and ignore many of the issues from which much of the artistic vigour of Lahiri's stories is derived. Critics themselves found it difficult to produce a consistent evaluation of Lahiri's stories and to faithfully identify the writer's position to the Indian or American community. It is just by overcoming our tendency to label and to see and interpret the world in black and white that we are able to read Lahiri's stories as what they really are – an insight into the essentials of life, but also an investigation of the condition of the individual in the contemporary world.

On another level, Lahiri's stories deal with the encounter between self and other, individual identity being in most cases the result of a mirroring effect. Although ethnicity seems to be central to all the stories, Lahiri is too little interested in ethnic aspects. Indianness is seldom, if ever, exaggerated on these pages. She resorts to India either as the setting of her stories or as place or cultural set of customs and beliefs most characters refer themselves to in order to define their identity. The stories also feature characters that are either Indian or Indian American. Yet, what Lahiri tries to avoid is the exoticism associated in the mind of the Westerners with either the locale or the people. She rather investigates and draws attention to problems of more general human interest that have nothing to do with India or being Indian either in India or America. The stories may be considered equally heterogeneous if analysed in terms of the narrative technique employed. Two of the stories "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" and "The Third and Final Continent" are first-person narratives. The former is narrated from the latter from the perspective of an Indian émigré in America. The rest are third-person narratives, but the story is filtered through the consciousness and sensibility of a more or less involved character. It would be difficult to say whether Lahiri's choice of method has anything to do with a certain pattern she has intended for the stories. But the effect she has obtained is a kaleidoscopic one. The reader is offered the possibility to look at the issues

the stories deal with from various angles, although we cannot speak about a multiple point of view narrative.

Interpreter of Maladies attempts to offer an interpretation of the maladies of the contemporary society and of the individual inevitably caught between here and there and yet belonging neither here nor there. Just like Mr. Kapasi, Lahiri would like to serve “as an interpreter between nations” (59), but mainly as an interpreter for the modern individual’s anxieties and torment.

“Unaccustomed Earth”, the title story from the book of the same name, contains the narrative of the inner conflict of an Indian-American woman, Ruma, who is married to Adam, an American and is about to have her second child, when she is visited by her father, an Indian retiree, in her new home in Seattle. The visit brings about a myriad of feelings, bringing back old resentments and a deep reflection on her relationship with her past.

As a young girl, Ruma had found extreme difficulty in living according to the Indian ways. To her parents’ displeasure, she and her brother Romi, were excessively attracted to the American way of life.

When Ruma and Adam started seeing each other, she kept it a secret until the day the engagement was officially announced. Her parents interpreted her choice as shame of her own roots, as a refusal to acknowledge her origins. Even before her marriage, her relationship with her parents had been difficult and later it resulted in a cold distant tie, turned longer when she moved to Seattle. The proximity of her father’s visit brings her back to extreme conflict in her innermost being. Intimately, she fears that, with the end of his trips, he might come to her home to stay, making her recall old habits she is no more used to, and relive the past she had once buried. Adam’s constant work trips make her double exile, from her roots and from New York, even lonelier, and this in turn makes her father’s visit seem more

unwelcome. According to Indian tradition, it is the daughter who cares for the father in his old age, but Ruma does not feel prepared for that. She knows that the visit will take place between two of her father's trips. From the beginning it is clear for the reader the ambiguity of Ruma's feelings, for at the same time she watches the news when he is scheduled to fly, to make sure there have not been any plane crash, she still keeps inside a series of motives to support her own attitudes.

After her mother's death, she assumed the duty of communicating with him every evening. As the time passed by, the phone calls had become a unique weekly conversation, usually on Sundays afternoons. Differently from her mother, who would have simply told her the date and timing of her arrival, if she had wanted to visit her, her father phoned asking her to. This fact make clear how different was the relationship she had with them.

Ruma had been engaged in a successful career in a law firm, but after the two weeks for bereavement due to her mother's death in an unsuccessful surgery she decided to quit her job and stay home, taking care of her child. Unconsciously, Ruma left behind a condition that gave her independence as an individual to devote herself to household, repeating her mother's social role. 'There were mornings she wished she could simply get dressed and walk out the door, like Adam. She didn't understand how her mother had done it. Growing up, her mother's example— moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household— had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma's life now.' (*Unaccustomed Earth*,11)

Her loneliness and the proximity of childbirth make her remember how much her mother's presence had been important when Akash was born, giving her a feeling of safety and

comfort. Her mother, in all her traditionalism, her linkage to roots, was her true homeland. This is a place where we all feel that our true identity is anchored.

In "*Reflections on Exile*", Edward Said argues that "Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile; some of them take benefit of their ambiguous status whereas others seem to adhere to an everlasting feeling of homelessness, trying to reproduce in the new land the principles that guided their lives in their native land."²⁶ (Said, 181) To the reader, the fact is quite discernible that along the years, Ruma had built a paradoxical relationship with her mother. At the same time she recognized in her mother attributes she herself would never have as she rejected submission to tradition. She is an exile in her innermost sanctum of being and finds it difficult to reach out to her father with the ease she could with her mother. The essence of that relationship was the conflict Ruma had faced all her life: her difficulty to understand who she actually was and to what world she belonged to may have been behind the void she felt which gnawed at her 'being' constantly.

There are some common themes and motifs in Lahiri's novel and short stories. The themes of exile, displacement, difficult relationships, communication problems and blending into new cultural environments play very strong roles in making the stories interesting in our present multicultural environment. Lahiri's final three stories, grouped together as "*Hema and Kaushik*," explore the overlapping histories of the title characters, a girl and boy from two Bengali immigrant families, set during significant moments of their lives. "*Once in a Lifetime*" begins in 1974, the year Kaushik Choudhuri and his parents leave Cambridge and

²⁶ Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000

return to India. Seven years later, when the Choudhuris return to Massachusetts, Hema's parents are perplexed to find that "Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge had." The next story, "*Year's End*," visits Kaushik during his senior year at Swarthmore as he wrestles with the news of his father's remarriage and meets his father's new wife and stepdaughters. The final story, "*Going Ashore*," begins with Hema, now a Latin professor at Wellesley, spending a few months in Rome before entering into an arranged marriage with a parent-approved Hindu Punjabi man named Navin. Hema likes Navin's traditionalism and respect towards her. The couple plan to settle in Massachusetts. But in Rome, Hema runs across Kaushik, now a world-roving war photographer. Even though Kaushik thinks that his origins are irrelevant as a photographer as he roams all over the world. Except for their names, Hema and Kaushik, there is nothing different in their lives that do not run parallel to any other American couple. The generational conflicts which Lahiri depicts are similar to any American family in any town. The fight for independence and the struggle for being connected to one's roots are the same in any life, be it American, Indian or Jamican.

The author's view of the experience of migration updates the reflections on collective memory. For her, the place of belonging is that which permits the individual be what he effectively is, no matter where he was born, no matter the traditions he was exposed to. The dialectical struggle between memory and forgetting accompanies the migrant man who flounders between past and present. However, being a second-generation migrant, Lahiri gives a different nuance to her dialectic. "*Unaccustomed earth*" neither focuses on tradition nor on the process of acculturation. It is a narrative that exposes the conflicts inherent to a hybrid identity, which have resulted from the negotiation between different cultures.

The collective memories of the diasporic peoples consist of ties with an idealized and distant homeland. Jhumpa Lahiri takes on the task of building those ties differently. Her narrative style, due to transculturation, brings out the fluidity of alternative identities. The introducing

epigraph to the book, a quotation from Hawthorne, suggests that 'men's destiny can be changed, when they sow their seeds in new soil'. That soil is exactly the place where new bonds of belonging can be built; no more based on the culture of homeland, not even based on the culture of a new country, but on the belief that we belong to the place where we want to stay. We can become what we want to by embracing the new and strengthening it with our rich, cultural yet diverse background.

Chapter 4

In the simmering cauldron of cultural diversity: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

As I read the introduction to Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, a passage caught my eye. It goes as follows:

What is striking about the new internationalism is that the move from the specific to the general, from the material to the metaphoric, is not a smooth passage of transition and transcendence. The 'middle' passage of contemporary culture, as with slavery itself, is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience. Increasingly, national cultures are being produced from the perspectives of disenfranchised minorities. (5, 6)

This passage became meaningful as I read *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Smith, a very young and emerging author of post-racial Britain who is the child of a British father and a Jamaican mother. Her stories have intersecting and often conflicting ethnic and religious currents. This particular simmering cauldron of ethnic and cultural delicacy deals with Bangladeshi, Afro-Caribbean, British and Muslim elements. Reading through the story becomes an amazing journey. In our present world where we have become so global that the world has almost become flattened, we find Smith's narration to be quite a daring venture. It may not be taken easily by many who may think it is not a realistic representation of present-day Britain. Yet, some readers may think that the expanding definitions of national identity have been grasped accurately in an age where they believe international borders are actually lines drawn on a map. It is also a known fact that cultural transition has never been smooth. The temperament of man is such that there is an inherent mechanism which repels drastic changes in their lives. Yet, for the sake of being a citizen of the world, we do acquire a varied patchwork of cultural

ideas and beliefs which eventually enrich us in many ways. We, as humans tend to be very harsh when it comes to acceptance of ideas foreign to us.

The personal freedom felt by the mixed entities, along with greater tolerance and a sense of a society increasingly at ease with itself, was mentioned elsewhere: "Her (Smith's) attitude to the complications and conflicts, loves and hates that inevitably result from living in a cultural melting pot is not only post-imperial but post-racial," wrote Anne Chisholm in the Sunday Telegraph. "One of the endearing qualities of her sharp-eyed but warm-hearted book is that it makes racism appear not only ugly and stupid but ludicrously out of date."²⁷

Zadie Smith draws a portrait of British society on the brink of a new millennium. It is a confused society of mixed races, cultures, languages and customs. Her novel *White Teeth* captures the very atmosphere that Salman Rushdie already tried to describe in his essay "The New Empire Within", written at the beginning of the 1980s: "I believe that Britain is undergoing a critical phase of its postcolonial period ... It's a crisis of the whole culture, of the society's entire sense of itself".²⁸(129) This crisis manifests itself in the individual's search for a personal identity, which is the major theme of *White Teeth*. Smith touches the problem of identity construction in a post-colonial Britain by using elements of the migrant novel, the bildungsroman and the historical novel or family history to cast a light on her characters. The story blends pathos and humour, all the while illustrating the dilemmas of immigrants and new generation immigrants as they face a new, and very different social system. Middle and working-class British cultures are also presented through the characters of the Chalfens, Jones and Iqbals. Though the story moves through different time frames, it

²⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/jan/26/fiction.zadiesmith>

²⁸ Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981-9*, London: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1992

focuses mainly on the parents and children of the culturally and ethnically diverse families inhabiting a space where racial clashes, both emotional and physical occur on a regular basis.

As a migrant narrative, the novel gives different perspectives of first and second generation migrant life in Britain. It focuses on the construction of personal identity within a diaspora and the problem of self-determination in relation to a white "mainstream" society which confronts people of a different origin with racism and misrecognition and automatically labels them as "different". Smith does not only present the migrant's intracultural conflict of assimilating to the dominant culture and retaining his/her original cultural identity, but also examines the intergenerational dichotomy between the traditionalistic views of parents and the Westernized views of their children. Through its continuous emphasis on the construction of self, *White Teeth* can also be defined as a bildungsroman. Chapter headings like "The Miseducation of Irie Jones" clearly allude to this classical genre. The novel is divided into four different parts exploring significant life-altering experiences of the main characters. While the first two parts, Archie 1974, 1945 and Samad 1984, 1857, concentrate on identity conflicts and new beginnings during male mid-life crisis, the last two sections, Irie 1990, 1907 and Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999, contain coming-of-age tales presenting the young generation's maturation process and the difficulties of puberty. On a third level, *White Teeth* can be interpreted as a historical novel about the lives of three families from Willesden Green, although Smith does not follow the usual form of chronological writing. Shifting between different levels of time, the author draws parallels between places and generations and recovers interventions in the past which explain the present identity problems of the characters and their involvement with one another. She explores the social concept of family by portraying dysfunctional structures and conflicts within families as well as bonds and friendships between the Joneses, the Iqbals and the Chalfens.

This book also investigates the concepts of human relationship. Archie and Samad remain good friends in spite of the failed relationships of their families and culture. Magid and Millat, Samad's twins, though real brothers, do not like each others' ways and never become affable as they had been separated in their childhood because their father wanted to keep at least one of them attached to his roots. Samad wanted to preserve his cultural heritage in a city like London where he sees rotten culture and values. He tells Magid, "You'll thank me in the end. This country's no good. We tear each other apart in this country." (White Teeth, 201) while the fact is that the country where his own roots lay came of existence through violence.

FutureMouse is a middle character and pushes the story forward in *White Teeth*. FutureMouse's life has been "programmed and designed" by Marcus Chalfen, but it escapes at the end, apparently to map out its own life. In this sense FutureMouse has a similar drive as the other persons in the story, Magid, Millat and Irie. All the characters appear to look for new dimensions in the new century .

Smith presents three different expressions of fundamentalism, cautiously separating them from "fundamentals." In the first two, KEVIN – "an extremist faction dedicated to direct, often violent action, a splinter group frowned on by the rest of the Islamic community; popular with the sixteen-to-twenty-five age group; feared and ridiculed in the press." and FATE, whose many members have concealed intentions. For example, Millat wants to be a gangster, and some members, such as Mo Hussein-Ishmael, join just to gain status. Similarly, Joshua and other members of FATE are involved just to get closer to either Jolie or Crispin. Thus though, they appear to be together for a declared cause, however all of them have different agendas. Smith has very intelligently exposed the reality of real life organizations.

On the other hand, Hortense and Ryan Topps believe sincerely in being Jehovah's Witnesses, and are happy living unspectacular, secluded lives with little excitement. They are real

fundamentalists without any ulterior motives. Again Smith has shown the life styles of true believers. All of the types of fundamentalism in the book compare with the routine lives of Archie and Samad. The narrow views of all the fundamentalist groups are exposed at the Future mouse conference. Their only objective is to make others understand their viewpoint, and their participation with fundamentalism detaches them from each other. In *White Teeth*, the writer brings up the age-old Nature/Nurture discussions, which are rooted in the biological sciences. Considering Smith's handling of the twins, Magid and Millat, one might understand that she prefers nurture to nature. While the two brothers are genetically similar, they are otherwise absolutely different. Magid is academic and respectful, while Millat is neglected and defiant. Since they are twins, their differences must be ascribed to their experiences, Magid's formative years in Bangladesh and Millat's at home in Willesden Green. Smith presents another similar dichotomy with Joyce and Marcus. Joyce is a "nurturer" and Marcus is a "believer in nature". Joyce is an avid horticulturalist and mother; she thinks she can take an errant teenager such as Millat and change him into a well-behaved person, just like nurturing any of her plants. She points Millat and Irie's inadequacies due to missing of a strong father figure, implying that they were not nurtured properly. At the same time, she ignores her own son Joshua, and thus not cultivating him, she lets him grow somewhat wild.

Marcus symbolizes the nature side of the Nature/Nurture discussion. He dedicates his life to the proposal that "altering something's nature alters it permanently". He makes sure that the FutureMouse cannot run away from its nature, which is to build up the cancers he plants into its genes. On the other hand, Archie is always leaving his most important decisions up to toss of a coin: to kill or not to kill the doctor, whether Magid and Millat should join up again, and whether or not he should commit suicide. Even when he had to shoot the doctor and in turn is shot in his leg from his own gun by the doctor, he exclaims, "For fuckssake, why did you do that? It's tails. See? It's tails. Look. Tails. It was tails." (*White teeth*, 540) Since little

motivates Archie to the point of taking a decision, relinquishing control of his life satisfies him. Thus, it is totally unexpected of him when he jumps in front of Millat's gun in the book's last moment. Archie's indecisive attempts at suicide and his spontaneous choice to risk his life at the FutureMouse conference, shows how significantly Archie builds up throughout the book. And finally, instead of leaving his decisions to a coin, Archie gambles by trusting himself. It gives him lot of contentment to know that he has truly and resolutely saved a life.

Smith's multicultural cast of personalities is a cross-section of today's London. In the simplest sense, there is a blend of English, Jamaicans, and Bengalis. However, Smith is too practical in her assessment of human character to leave the issue of race and ethnicity to fall under close scrutiny. Her actors are caught up between different cultures. When Clara, Archie's wife, is a teenager she, like Millat, is fascinated by her parents' tradition. When she strays from her legacy the first time, her teeth are broken. When she wanders a second time by marrying Archie, Hortense, her mother disowns her. Millat faces similar fate when he strays from Samad's preparation for him to have traditional, Bengali views. Samad calls him a "good-for-nothing" while adoring Magid. As a reverse action, Millat becomes a militant fundamentalist. Samad lives in the past. He loves to recount the history of the Indian Independence movement and how he is related to the great Mangal Pandey, who he says is his great grandfather. He meets his sons' music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones and it is no surprise that he falls for her in a big way and risks his reputation by going to visit her. He proves his fallibility as a man and his desire gets the upper hand in the situation. He says, "I don't want to go. I want you." (WT, 181) Samad is a hypocrite when he comments a little while later, "To the pure all things are pure." (WT, 182) as Poppy fishes out a toothbrush from her bag to give to him, thus even though he tries so hard to get western ways out of his family and life, simple physical pleasure, which is denied to him overpowers him.

Magid is also wedged between cultures, but strays in the opposite direction. He finds motivation in genetic engineering as the new form of God. While he was serving his time in the far corner of Bangladesh, he was also mapping out his future. He came back to study the English law and is the source of disappointment to his father who says, "More English than the English. Believe me, Magid will do Millat no good. They have both lost their way. Strayed so far from the life I had intended for them (WT, 406)". Samad is distraught as he can see that his sons have become strangers to him in a strange land. "These days, it feels to me like you make a devil's pact when you walk into this country...it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, you children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere." (WT, 407) This is what a multicultural, multiracial city living does to you when the borderlines blur and "I begin to believe that birthplaces are accidents, that everything is an accident." (WT, 407) "As Samad described this dystopia with a look of horror, Irie was ashamed to find that the land of accidents sounded like paradise to her. Sounded like freedom." (WT, 408)

Irie is trapped between cultures in her very genetics, as she is Jamaican as well as English. Unlike Samad, Archie and Clara did not want to force their child to embrace a certain cultural heritage. Other demonstrations of mixed ethnicity in the novel include Samad's restaurant, where the food is so anglicized it is no longer Indian, and O'Connell's, an Irish pub run by a Muslim from Middle East, with an American nickname.

Samad Iqbal, had different ideas about living his life. Yet, chance or fate had intervened in the form of his twin sons. His growing alienation with his wife, Alsana, his loosening hold on his family and his disillusionment with his job made him a very forlorn creature. He admits without regret. "We are split people. For myself, half of me wants to sit quietly with my legs crossed, letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me. But the other half wants

to fight the holy war. Jihad!...in the end, your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth.” (WT, 179). For a man who fought in the war, was torn away from his country of birth, by choice or by circumstance, it can be a supreme moral dilemma when things gradually slip out of hand. Children grow up and blend into the culture of their own surroundings; they join groups that they consider to be fashionable or just do things they think will shock their parents, while, parents like Samad who has problems letting go or accepting have trouble living with themselves. At some point, a person like Samad needs to be saved from himself.

By including English, Bengalis, and Jamaicans in her descriptions, Smith presents a true account of British diversity. Furthermore, Smith is right to recognize the racial tensions that originate from cross-cultural and cross-class relationships, including Alsana’s lack of trust for the Chalfens, Samad’s aspirations to raise his sons in Bangladesh, and Joyce Chalfen’s supposition that Irie could not have inherited her understanding from her working-class parents. In fact, at the end of the book, ethnicity, cultures, class, and customs mix homogeneously. Irie’s unborn daughter, symbol of the candid future, is an afro-Caribbean, a white English and Bengali. *White Teeth* presents the reader with racial discrimination, cultural assimilation, gender roles and history and leaves it open for discussion.

Conclusion

Awareness of simultaneous dimensions from plurality of vision

The treatment of the migrant condition in literature is the most engrossing topic stimulating intellectual debate. The post colonial/postmodernist world has seen the emergence of interdisciplinary and cultural studies as the forceful areas of academic exploration. As Elleke Boehmer states, “the postcolonial and migrant novels are seen as appropriate texts for such explorations because they offer multi-voiced resistance to the idea of boundaries and present texts open to transgressive and non-authoritative reading” (243). Thus, in a world where identity, origin and truth are seen in postmodernist terminology as structureless collections, authors like Rushdie, Naipaul, Lahiri and Smith are all very much part of a global community of writers mingling with a multitude of others who dare to write differently.

The process of migration, dispersion and assimilation of people all over the globe went on for ages and linked with the increase in population, it ultimately gave rise to the concept of a “melting pot”. India became the first melting pot of the world and since the coming of the Aryans, India has received invaders, traders and refugees in various migratory patterns. There are the Greeks and the Macedonians who came with Alexander; then the spread of Islam saw the displacement of the whole Parsi community from Persia to India; then came the Arab traders followed by Persians, Afghans and Turkish traders as well as invaders, and finally came the Mughals. All these migratory people have undergone such assimilation in the melting pot of India that they have become its natives. Even the colonial powers did not escape effects of the melting pot. The Anglo-Portuguese-Indian community in India is more Indian than anything else. The second world war saw the migration of some Jews to India; the partition of the Indian sub-continent saw Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs seeking out their

own communities and migrating in order to give their families safer and similar surroundings. 1970s saw the coming of “hippies” and all along there has been constant migration of traders and refugees from India’s neighboring countries like China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Burma. These latter groups are still in the process of assimilation. However inviting the façade may look like, if the room inside is not exude hospitality, one may feel unwelcome. This is bound to happen because the idea of home and family differs from culture to culture. This difference is not fundamental; it is superficial. But so are all cross-cultural conflicts and paradoxes. The first encounter that any migrant has with his/her country of adoption is with superficialities. It definitely takes time to scratch this surface of superficiality and till then it is only loneliness for company.

It is not only the diaspora of Indian community who find themselves to be in a slightly uneasy space of renewed perception. West Indian, African, Chinese and even writers of Nepalese origin find themselves in that particular space. The following passage warrants mention in this context.

“The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves- because they are so defined by others- by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.”²⁹ (124-125)

²⁹ Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticism 1981-9*, London: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1992

The modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two distinct classes. One class embraces those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the weight of their native land offshore. The other class comprises of those who have been bred since childhood outside India. They have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of their origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement whereas those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have produced an enviable body of English literature. These writers while depicting migrant characters in their fiction explore the theme of displacement and self-fashioning. The diasporic Indian writers' depiction of dislocated characters gains immense importance if seen against the geo-political background of the vast Indian subcontinent. That is precisely why the fruit of their toil have such a large global readership and an enduring appeal. The diasporic Indian writers have generally dealt with characters from their own displaced community but some of them have also taken a liking for Western characters and they have been convincing in dealing with them. Two of Vikram Seth's novels *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* have Americans and Europeans as their subjects exclusively and the author has successfully narrated their lives with assurance.

If we go back a bit, we will remember that it was the brute force of colonial powers that made most people aliens in their own country. It was done through sheer dominance with the uneducated classes and with the upper echelons of society, the displacement started through linguistic means. It is in this colonial context that the native writers generated the various sub-genres of English literature.

Accomplished literary figures like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, who established Indian-English literature, were all subjects of the British rule in India. Even after

the colonized countries got independence, writers of many of those countries still faced a state of exile-either because of dictatorship in their countries, or faced racial persecution, or were at the receiving end of ethnic cleansing. Those who thought that their kind of views would not be accepted easily opted to migrate to countries which were much more open to their ideas.

African-English writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ngugi wa Thiongo', Wole Soyinka, and Ben Okri all found themselves in some sort of exilic state. The Indian-English writers, notably, Raja Rao became an expatriate even before the independence of the country; G. V. Desani was born in Kenya and lived in England, India, and USA; and Kamala Markandaya married an Englishman and lived in Britain. Nirad C. Chaudhuri preferred the English shores because his views were not readily accepted in India. It is almost as if these writers have discovered their Indianness when they are out of their birthplace. Evidently they have the advantage of looking at their homeland from afar and from a considerable distance. This distance affords them the objectivity that is so crucial in having a clear perception of their native land. In that sense, through their writing, they help to define India or whichever country they belonged to.

Rushdie's "imaginary homeland" take in the entire world. The Iranian "fatwa" decree has added a new dimension to Rushdie's exilic condition. A major contribution in this regard has been that of the Indian writers, like Rushdie and Naipaul, who live as world citizens - a global expression of the exilic condition. Indian-English writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru have all made their names while they have been living abroad.

The non-resident Indian writers have explored their sense of displacement—a perennial theme in all exile literature. They have given more poignancy to the exploration by dealing not only with a geographical dislocation but also a socio-cultural sense of displacement. My reasons for being so enamoured of this subject is because their concerns as regards the socio-cultural state are also very global; as today's world is afflicted with the problems of immigrants, refugees, and all other exiles. These exilic states give birth to the sense of displacement and rootlessness. Yet there is a kind of charm and ingenuity to this state because it has given birth to a certain type of literature to which we can all relate to. According to Rushdie—"Migrants, must of necessity, make a new imaginative relationship with the world because of the loss of familiar habitats." (*IH*, 125)

Just as the United Kingdom, the United States of America has also attracted Indians, Caribbeans, Hispanics, and people of other nationalities as a destination of academic and economic prosperity. The size of the diaspora community in the US is gradually increasing in the post-globalization era. But it is quite debatable to assert that globalization has solved the problems of the diaspora citizens. No doubt, problems like racism are no longer as headstrong as before, but the problems of the inner "human condition" still plague the diasporic community.

In the issue #14 of the *Samar* magazine which appeared in the Fall/Winter of 2001, writer Sheetal Majithia says:

'The more things change, the more they actually stay the same.' The opening line of this essay, written months before the events of September 11th, and the U.S. air strikes on Afghanistan, does not hold -- not in reference to literature or very much else. Nothing seems the same. To focus on the changed context of South Asian American literature seems to overlook the magnitude of recent changes not only in

our frameworks of global cultural understanding, but in the make-up of our geopolitical landscape. Why would a consideration of literature be at all important when people all over the world, in the U.S. as well as in Central and South Asia, suffer as a show of shocking violence grips the globe? It is in fact precisely at this moment that cultural and racial difference and the contest over its representation become crucial.

It is only when we can condition ourselves to be one with the rest of the world, only then can we actually hope to come out of the state that Ms. Majithia has talked about. After appropriating a foreign language and almost making it part of their own language, authors whose mother tongue is not English have come a long way in putting their mark on the world. They have made it possible for others to look at literary texts in a different light and appreciate it for what it is worth intrinsically. As long as writers continue in this vein, we will be able to savour the delicacy of literary art and hopefully become more aware of things around us. For anyone who wishes to transcend national and provincial limits, I wish to quote this following passage as my end words from Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile*. He writes:

“Hugo St. Victor, a twelfth- century monk from Saxony, wrote these hauntingly beautiful lines:

It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about invisible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his

love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.”³⁰(185)

³⁰ Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000

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