

## **Discerning Diaspora through Gendered Lenses: An Overview**

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**Abstract:** The paper sets out to explore the rich repertoire of diasporic criticism and also chart the ways in which gender, that has emerged as a primary constituent in discerning diaspora, situates itself within the mainstream discourse to modify its borders and underscore the heterogeneity of the diasporic experience; the need to privilege individual and specific contexts over generalized portrayals of 'being'. The paper interrogates the validity of homogenized perceptions and resists the attempts to present meta narratives to capture the diasporic consciousness. The artistic imprint of the diasporic world of existence as represented in diasporic literature finds preliminary mention at the concluding segments of the paper.

### **Defining Diaspora as a metaphor:**

Amongst all available contemporary definitions of Diaspora, the most prominent is the one put forward by William Safran, in one of his early works that perceives Diaspora as an ongoing process of perpetual evolution; whose roots could be traced to a ethno-biblical community that historically dispersed and remained united in its common desire to return and reclaim their original homeland. All models of dispersion have since drawn excessively on this paradigm of binaries and expanded it to observe Diaspora as a dichotomous phenomenon, adhering to homeland/ hostland juxtaposition, with its emotional imagination fixated in evoking the feelings of loss, memory and nostalgia. Subsequent interpretations attempted at breathing newer meanings into this intriguing ethno-political construct and Robin Cohen suggested that the occurrence could be adequately analysed and categorized on the basis of impulses that lay at the core of such 'dispersion' or travel into newer territories. Thus his divisions of victim, labour, trade and colonial Diasporas were formulated to include myriad groups of people who could experience diaspora by the virtue of their inclusion in the previously mentioned categories. This assumption too, rooted itself in binaries of 'us' and 'them'; of 'staying rooted' and travel as 'going away' from the homeland. Recognising the forces of globalisation and trans-cultural travel, Kachig Toloyan, in his inaugural issue of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991, floated the idea of Diaspora as a state of being stateless, thus forging concepts of trans-nationalism and by corollary the notion of fluid, often suspended, dual identities. To quote Toloyan:

“The term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes works like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community” (4-5).

The next phase of diasporic discourse was reluctant to formulate a working definition of the term keeping in mind the complexities that typified and problematized the concept. The violent basis of the phenomenon found prominence in the works of Brian Axel, who coined the term ‘diasporic imagery’ to denote its violent beginnings. Brubaker treated ‘diaspora not as a bounded entity but as an idiom, stance and claim”(1). His critical imagination noted that it was futile to sum up “a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’as an entity, a bounded group, an ethno-demographic or ethno-cultural fact, it may be more fruitful and certainly more precise to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms and practices, and so on”(13)

Some of the most path breaking concepts that saw Diaspora as an ever evolving and transforming phenomenon came from the arena of culture studies where Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy reiterated identity formations, borne out of travel and migrations, to be fluid and overlapping. Hall’s suggestion that cultural identities are best seen as evolving, challenged the assumption of a fixed diasporic identity, allowing it to be seen as a process rather than a historical fact:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

A similar concept of evolving, ever fluid construct was once again seen in the formations and definitions of hybrid identities that seemed to capture diasporic imagination at the turn of the century.

### **Revisiting Diaspora**

The term diaspora that till late 20<sup>th</sup> century instinctively recalled its primarily pagan and biblical origin and reverberated with embedded sense of Dispersion, Exodus, Homecoming and reclamation; at the turn of the century shook off its existential angst that came with the concept of trans nationalism to pursue a more enchanting and encompassing notion of hybrid nationalism and existential amalgamation. Renowned theorist ‘ Amba Pande’ in her book Women in Indian Diaspora not only focuses on this paradigm shift, she pauses to celebrate it as she attempts a line of demarcation between migration and diaspora.

While migration pertains to human search of livelihood and can happen within the geographical borders of a country, diaspora alludes more specifically to international migration and long term settlements in a foreign land lending itself to concepts of victimhood and home coming.

While migration brings to the forefront issues of physical relocation and cultural assimilation or the lack of it, Diaspora even in its nascent, modest form focuses on graver issues like cultural alienation, acculturation, existential crisis borne out of angst to carve out a niche for oneself in a seemingly strange and therefore hostile environment. Because of the existential nature of the issues, diaspora has often warranted deep theoretical scrutiny and has successfully lent itself to numerous disciplinary and cross disciplinary approaches.

The Singhvi Committee, constituted by the Government of India, defines diaspora as a 'generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India' (High Level Committee 2001). In spite of the fact that the definition itself hints at the heterogeneity of the territories from where the displacement began, in its strategic use of the word 'generic', the widespread heterogeneity of this phenomenon is also underscored in the patterns of migration that happened over a sustained period of time as also in the geographical and cultural diversities of the chosen host lands that became preferred venues for long term settlements. The multifarious diversity that impacts 'Indian' Diaspora in particular remains understated in the inadequate classification of the same in two broad categories- the 'Old' and 'New' Diaspora. While the former is further categorized on terms of the nature of the immigrants, 'indentured' laborers and convicts and 'Free Migrants' like professionals, war recruits, traders, and employees of the British government, the New Diaspora comprises different categories of migrants, skilled or highly skilled professionals, small time traders or retailers, Semi/ unskilled workers, student migrants or amnesty seekers.

### **Literature Review**

Origin of Diaspora Studies can be traced to the start of the post-colonial period. Diaspora Writers have been analyzed and many scholars have contributed their significant output and findings in the field. Literature review is the research tool for the current research. The scholar has gone through several journals of different universities for the said research. The scholar also met experts to collect the useful material for the present study. The work has taken into contention the efforts of scholars of Indian Diaspora studies, Expatriate studies as well as those of Indian literature in English.

Some of the works consulted are as follows:

Ashish Gupta and Uma Parameshwaran wrote from their experiences of migration. Gurbhagat Singh explored the theoretical formulation. David Stouck's research mostly focused on reading and reception theories. The writers like Shyam Asani, P.A.Abraham, Rajul Bhargav, B.R.Nagpal and Jasbir Jain develop their arguments through comparative understanding. The volume presents a new paradigm to post-colonial analysis and critiquing of diasporic writing.

Vijay Mishra in his research, *Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (Routledge 2007) confers in detail the works by well known Indian Diaspora writers like V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G.Vassanji, Shani Mootoo, Bharti Mukharjee, Rohinton Mistry and Hanif Kureishi. He makes a difference between old Indian Diaspora and their reasons for leaving the country as well as new Indian Diaspora subject and their reasons for preferring to settle in other land.

Mishra states that a full understanding of the Indian Diaspora can only be achieved if the attention is paid to the particular location in states. He also examined the research of key writers, many now based across the globe in Canada, Australia, America and the U.K. He studies the works of V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G.Vassanji, Shani Mootoo, Bharti Mukharjee, Rohinton Mistry and Hanif Kureishi to show how they exemplify both the diasporic imaginary and the respective traumas of the 'old' and 'new' Indian diasporas. Mishra in this book emphasizes the importance of understanding the history and background of a writer if one is to relish the book produced by that writer. Mishra discusses almost all the important texts by Naipaul and Rushdie and tries to state how Diasporic experiences shape their imagination and plots.

He observes and rightly states,

Mishra further defines diasporic imaginary as, any ethnic enclave in a nation – state that defines itself, consciously or unconsciously, as a group that lives in displacement (Mishra 14).

Mishra seems to use the word 'Diaspora' skeptically only. Immigrants, trans- nationals or global people cannot be synonyms for the word 'Diaspora' because, according to Mishra, this term is reserved for an unhappy breed whose growing fortune cannot compensate for the pain they continue to suffer due to dislocation. Further, Jasbir Jain in *Writers of the Indian Diaspora* (Rawat Publication – 2003) presents essays on diasporic writings which provide introspections regarding the definitions of Home and Nation.

Malti Agrawal in her edited volume *New Perspectives on Indian English Writings* (Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., 2007) provides a collection of thirty eight research papers on various fictionists, dramatists and poets of Indian origin. These papers study the major works of the pioneers as well as emerging Indian authors writing in English. These scholar writers and researchers include Kamala Markandaya, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Girish Karnad, Manju Kapur, Bharti Mukherjee, R.K.Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and many others.

These research papers touch the most sensitive issues such as social dichotomy, cultural hegemony, clash between ethnic groups, and conflict between eastern and western ideologies.

Some of the papers of the book study in depth the poem of Kamala Das who is chiefly known for raising a voice of protest against exploitation of women. The book brings in limelight the voices raised by Indian women writers writing in English against gender bias and male chauvinism. This edited volume is of great help to the students and researchers who want to take a deep plunge into the ocean of Indian English Writing.

Similarly Dushyant Nimavat has also provided his monumental contribution and findings on Women Diaspora Poets in his Ph.D. thesis entitled "The Cassandras in Exile: A Study of the Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam". In his present work he has concluded that sense of up rootedness and dislocation, insecurity and alienation and nostalgia is clearly expressed in the poems. In his dissertation, he undertook the study of five diaspora women poets: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam.

All these women poets belong to South Asian region: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are Indians who have settled abroad. Meena Alexander and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have lived in the USA while Sujata Bhatt lives in Germany. All of them have travelled widely across Europe and the USA. Meena Alexander belongs to Kerala, Sujata Bhatt is from Gujarat and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni hails from Bengal.

Moniza Alvi is born in Pakistan but she has lived in England since she was only a few months old. Jean Arsanayagam is a unique case of a diaspora. She is a Dutch Burgher women poet married to a Tamil. She has undergone the most agonizing experience of being alienated and exiled. He concludes that multiculturalism in modern times should be seen as an opportunity for flourishing and flowering rather than as a problem. I reiterate that the solution of all problems regarding diasporic dilemma lies in acceptance of diversity, multi-culturalism, assimilation and expansion of one's identity into global one.

Nostalgia and memories of homeland are natural human phenomenon which occurs within the country also when one moves from one place to another. It is true that alien culture would often come as a shock but tolerance, assimilation, harmony and understanding are the solution of all diasporic problems.

In addition to this, S. Sujaritha in her research paper, Transformation of Diaspora Studies: From Discrimination to Identity Formation concluded that the diaspora writers project the thematic transformation; she has studied and concluded that diaspora literature too has shifted its focus from the theme of discrimination to identity formation. Yet this reading does not come to the conclusion that discriminations are completely stopped but it has reduced to a maximum level.

Shashikala Muthumal Assella in her doctoral thesis on Contemporary South Asian Women's Fiction: the Difference investigates the difference of South Asian women's fiction and their fictional narratives of women's life away from their home.

The selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amulya Malladi, Bharti Kirchner, V.V. Ganeshanathan, Nayomi Munaweera, Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Shaila Abdullah studied here which interrogate the depiction of South Asian women characters both within diasporic American locations and in South Asian settings. She finds out the uniqueness of South Asian American women of writing about re-negotiated spaces and new transnational cosmopolitan identities of women, both within and without diasporic boundaries, therefore bringing forth the new concerns of South Asian American women and opens new avenues for future critical engagement with their contemporary fiction.

Samantha Naidu's Ph.D. thesis entitled Towards a Transnational Feminist Aesthetic: An Analysis of Selected Prose Writing by Women of the South Asian Diaspora comes to a conclusion that as more and more women writers of the South Asian diaspora produce popular texts, some of them memoirs and autobiographies or novels for adolescents, the question of self-exoticization becomes more pertinent. As publishers search for texts produced by someone with 'authentic roots' in a specific culture, authors respond by writing novels which create unfamiliar worlds in a familiar form. In this way authors are persuaded to exoticise their cultures, and in so doing they occupy the position of cultural brokers within the global publishing industry.

The publishers meanwhile are fortified as consecrators of literary value. The writers in this study are caught between a desire to reach the widest possible audience and the desire to address feminist, racial or political issues. They therefore oscillate between inscribing a transnational feminist, aesthetic and perpetuating neo imperialist form of exoticisation and cultural othering. At the same time they either perpetuate or radically alter the romantic genre with their contributions.

Thus from various studies and literature review the researcher has felt that a lot of works have been done on general themes of Diaspora writings, Diaspora writers of particular regions, and a particular genre and female subjectivity in particular has been extensively studied.

However there are few unsung works underlining the theme of Indianness and Identity crisis which are yet to be explored. Bharti Kirchner who is an Indo-Canadian writer has always been seen as a cook book writer but by further exploring her novels in detail, specifically *Shiva Dancing* and *Shirmila's Book*, one can understand her better as a writer of Diaspora sensibility. Similarly Peggy Mohan who belonged to Trinidad is yet to be explored as a writer grappling with the theme of Identity Crisis and Indianness and as also Chitra Divakaruni. Lot of work has been done on Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee but *Oleander Girl* and *Before we Visit the Goddess* have

been hardly explored with the above mentioned theme. All these writers belong to different locale yet share similar themes of writing with little difference.

### **Locating women in Indian diasporic Discourse**

Patterns of migration, relocation, settlement and economic contribution have been the key areas of early scholastic discourse within the ambit of Indian Diaspora while the gendered experience within it which is as diverse and real as mainstream Diaspora received little representation in the empirical structures graphed by early theorists. The voice of the woman and her unique experience as a differentiated social group was suppressed while her presence which was primarily non- agentative was rendered marginal and examined only as an appendage to mainstream criticism of the Diaspora. Her unique experience was authoritatively subsumed under the fierce effort to homogenise and present meta narratives of the phenomenon. According to Amba Pande:

Overall women either remained as passive agents, or their experiences were overlooked under homogenised perceptions. As a result till the 1960s and early 1970s the term 'migrants' largely stood for male migrants and their families that included their wives and children (Boyd and Grieco 2003)

With the upsurge in feminist epistemology that made the female/ gendered experience an integral part of migration studies, the discourse witnessed a paradigm shift whereupon the marginal voices and the uncharted territories of woman specific diasporic experience were conceded space within the precincts of Indian Diasporic Studies. However, in spite of affecting a gender sensitive position, the scholastic efforts of feminist studies could not escape the overpowering instinct to homogenize personal, distinctive struggles of women migrants from 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries or stereotype them as "victims" with little or no voice in matters concerning them.

An attempt to comprehend the position of women in diasporic discourse requires a thorough literature review of the feminist scholastic efforts which brought the female experience to the forefront. However, a closer attentive scrutiny reveals that traditional feminist studies included histories of 'migrant women' as a later adjunct to the main discourse and yet had an impressive impact on migration studies. Migration theories were revisited and perceptibly edited to accommodate the issues of migrant women into the main body of feminist scholarship. (Amba Pande January 2018)

This paradigmatic shift did not happen overnight and can be traced through the last quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Nawyn 2010, Pessar and Mahler 2001, Helen Ralson 1988, Rayaprol 1997, Boyd and Grieco 2003, Hondanneu- Sotelo 2000, McDowell 1993) While the first wave of

feminism that started in the 60's and continued to the 70's acknowledged women as a perceptible presence in the arena of migration research to offer a binary male versus female distinction, the 1980's saw the rumblings of feminism grow to claim authoritative positions within the literary theoretical discourse and make the Feminist Standpoint Theory a standard for critical insights into all branches of knowledge. Linked to this rise of 'radical feminism' in the developed world was the incessant interrogations by feminist ideologue from the developing nations who questioned the monolithic structures embedded within precincts of feminist studies. The focus thus shifted from collective womanist perspective to a more defined, differentiated and demarcated territory of individualized, personalized experiences of travel, migration and belonging that found its voice in the postulations forwarded in the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander, who recounted the limited way in which western feminist agenda appropriated the mantle of protest on behalf of women in colour, based on presumptions that ethnicity, colour, race or social classes had little role to play in the articulation of female subjectivity. This impulse was primary in drafting sustainable theories that would provide an alternative framework and terminologies for assessing and comprehending the 'Women's experience' within the already charted territory of Indian Diasporic studies. While Sara Ahmed et al investigate the ways in which the intersections and interceptions of class, race, gender and sexuality with home and uprooting shape subjectivities, Avatar Brah explores 'diasporic spaces' by juxtaposing it against concepts of home, border and diaspora to discover theories of "entanglements of genealogies of dispersal with those of 'staying put'" (83) uncovers the complex notion of "home" to be a problematised arena within feminine contexts. Gayatri Gopinath too, in her iconic book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* focuses on the observation that feminism had failed to comprehend the entrenched notions of patriarchy that paints a nation in its own colours of heterosexual normative and deftly weaves these conceptions into the main body of diasporic discourse. Diaspora as indicative of dispersal, or scattering of seeds itself has heteronormative instincts at its core, with the associative metaphor of land left behind as unchanging root and the seed dispersed as transformative and regenerative, travelling distances to seed, spread and procreate. Within the heart of feminist discourse too were assumptions entrenched in homogenized perceptions that relegated every other obliterating variable like class, language, caste and history of migration to the periphery to assume gendered existence as the only category endowing 'invisibility' to the female player within the ambit of diaspora and reclamation of the same as the only defining paradigm of subjectivation.

At the turn of the decade approaching 1990's, feminist epistemology first essentialized gender as an important, however not sole determinant that impacts women and produces differentiated outcomes at different stages of diaspora like pre migration stage, the migration stage and lastly the stage of settlement and amalgamation (see Boyd and Greico 2003; United Nations, 23). Gender in consequence, was identified as the basic, constitutive element of



society that permeated through micro and macro level processes to generate multi layered identities, considered to be fundamental for understanding the economic, social and demographic realities. In this context, the inter sectionality of gender with other social constructs like race/ ethnicity/ class and nationalism comes out to be a discerning factor in decoding women's migration into host lands and their assimilation into the alien culture (see Mc Donald 2007, Hom 1999, Shepperson 1966). An important criteria in this freeplay of intersecting modalities in the context of the 'third world' and that of Asia act as determinant factors in sculpting gendered identities as gender relations, hierarchies within families and the access to resources are remarkably different from those in the developed societies of the world ( see McDowell 1993, Di Stefano 1990). For decades after its emergence, feminist scholarship remained primarily ethnocentric and tilted its scales to throw its weight in favour of western paradigms of subjectivity wherein the immigrant woman from third world was typified as a "victim of Patriarchy" oppressed and dictated by conservatism of primitive societies. These ethnocentric and neo-colonialist theories that centered round 'liberating' and 'modernising' migrant women from repressive moulds of patriarchy were not even relevant from the perspective of third world societies whose cultural format were different and produced different readings of woman's position and experiences. The gap in evaluating female agency with regards to third world countries were primarily because gender as a category remained a marginalized sub field in diaspora studies and also because any attempt at subjectivity invariably ended up in highlighting the victimhood status and passivity of the women from third world.

The lacuna was located and bridged when feminist discourse in the third world took notice of this oversight and started registering the voice of the 'other' woman, challenging her stereotypical representation (see Hugo 1999; Zlotnik 1995). The increasing feminization of International migration from and among the developing countries further accentuated the process of incorporation of socio-cultural standings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries. As diasporas are embedded in the milieus of both host land and home land, engendering hybridity of cultures, the later narratives within the diasporic realms increasingly challenged the androcentricism and overbearing western paradigms and sought to record the manner in which gender along with other sustaining variables not only shaped the material experiences of migration but also its conception as a phenomenon ( see Emma Parker). Such overtures require a deeper understanding of the women's experience within the diaspora, the patterns of adjustment and strategies effected by her to comes to terms with the changes that diaspora induces. As Amba Pande writes:

" It is important to raise several questions in this context: does migration affect women's authority within the family; does it influence power relations and decision making in the family and alter patriarchal structures? How do these women create a niche for themselves through

personal growth, social networks and economic participation in the host country; as well as flaunt their multicultural identities? Most importantly, how do women adapt to the host country as well as maintain links with their country of origin negotiating and recreating new identities? Many studies have continued to assess several such questions. According to Reinhart (as quoted in Rayaprol 1997, 38) feminist ethnography mainly aims at three goals; (1) to document the activities and the lives of the women; (2) to understand and present women's experience from their own point of view; (3) to represent women's behaviours as an expression of their particular social context."

### **Indian women in Diaspora**

Women have always formed an integral part of Indian diaspora though their travel and migration narratives were often subsumed under the male centric homogenized models of perceptions that formed the initial framework for Diaspora Studies. Consequently their troublesome passage into the inner whorls of diaspora, the processes of adoption and adaption that such journeys engender went unnoticed and unmapped. While rootedness in the socio cultural moorings of the home nation and identification with the belief systems ingrained in the historical antecedents of the homeland actually distinguish a woman's position in the diaspora as different from her male counterpart, she is seen as a torch bearer of indigenous culture in the seemingly alien world. The onus of retaining and conserving it falls on her, while the responsibility of dispersing or spreading it is endowed upon her male counterpart. While Indian culture essentially is immensely diverse and heterogeneous, the patriarchal social order seems to be at the core of it. In spite of the subservient position designated for the women within the cultural premises of home country, women have paradoxically colluded with patriarchy to become the transmitters of culture to the next generation. Though this apparently seems to underscore her secondary position, yet it ends up hinting at her dominant position within the limits of her home and family. However with the expansion and spread of the feminist ideologue along ever widening venues of education, modernization, equal opportunities, economic independence and the like women both within and outside diaspora have not improved their social positions but have often challenged the patriarchal order in several ways.

The same notions of social conservatism and fierce patriarchy were ported in the process of migration. In a country as diverse as India, what women carry as cultural baggage is an extremely heterogeneous, diverse, dynamic set of values and practices that are rooted in centuries old civilizational and cultural consciousness. Women of all classes, caste religion and social backgrounds have migrated to foreign lands carrying with them the burden of the collective unconscious which they have seeded and modified in far flung nations of their residence. As culture is a not a static collection of beliefs, customs or practices; monolithic in its implications, it constantly contours itself to suit the conditions in which it is placed. Thus it is

perpetually nascent and dynamic in the sense that it continually reconstructs and reshapes itself to adapt to the situation in which it is set. While 'continuity' and rootedness essentialises the basic impulse of Indian culture and manifests itself within the diaspora, it lends itself to modifications as well which is anticipated in its transactions and associations with other contiguous cultures and local conditions. These transactional mingling with newer cultures that effects ruptures within the limits of indigenous culture actually leads to the evolution of newer, hybrid cultures, with its own distinct socio-cultural moorings (see Pande 2017, 33-34). To quote Pande who brings together the diverse modalities to explain the impact of this transactional interface within the diaspora:

"These factors result in significant diversities and differences within the Indian Diaspora. The normative 'Indianness' too differs in the context of different groups based on the period during which the migration took place—for example the Indentured diaspora and the new diaspora and even within these groups. What they are bound by is a sense of 'belonging' to an ancient civilizational worldview that represents 'Indianness'. This sense of belongingness leads to Indian cultures being sustained even after centuries of separation and integration with the cultures of the receiving countries. Thus the Indian culture in a diasporic setting is under constant making and remaking while women as carriers of Indian culture play an important role in this process of both continuity and rupture. Their role in the inheritance of the 'Indianness' is as important as their role in integration in the host societies."(Pande 2017)

Feminist insights into the broad arena of diasporic studies seem to suggest that migration and diasporic conditions affect women's authority and alter the power relations both inside the family as well as in the larger context of the society. It often impacts patriarchal structures to alter its dimensions in accordance with the changing socio economic contexts of home and host countries. But such alterations seldom follow a linear path and pick up deviations to express its basic randomness and inherent complexity. While on one hand, migration with its liberating instincts can initiate egalitarianism in the family, transport women into agentative spheres of being, effect new opportunities for women and recreate alternative social-cultural practices (see Hondangeu- Sotelo 2000), it can also lead to hardening of restrictive patriarchal norms. The latter is often a reflexive manoeuvre to contain the women within the permitted limits of patriarchy in a perceptibly insecure, hostile or immoral host society and often results in situations like physical abuse, honour killings and other violent extremities (see Kang 2003. Kurien 1999, Judge 1992, 1994). Issues like marital discord, lack of adjustment in an altered social milieu, nostalgia and ensuing loneliness, get perpetuated within the limits of diaspora.

Case studies within the diasporic discourse reveal the anxiousness to control the women in a seemingly hostile and alien environment. A much cited study involves indentured women who faced exploitation in the hands of their colonial masters and plantation management alike, as

well as their male partners because of the imbalance in the sex ratio of the labourers, where men far outnumbered women. It gave rise to suspicion and insecurity and resulted in physical abuse and other forms of exploitation for women. Conveniently patriarchy too projected these women as morally deficient, reckless individuals making them objects of malicious accusations (see Lal 1985, Reddock 1995, Niranjana, 2006). This tendency to brand women in diasporic space as immoral was strongly countered by later women scholars as well as renowned theorists of subaltern studies like Peter Emmer. As closely related disciplines it is beyond doubt that subaltern theorization might spill over feminist arenas to forage a better understanding of allied issues. Both the disciplines highlighted the fact that migration through the system of indenture and the capacity of indentured women to adapt to rapidly evolving socio-economic conditions through education and economic empowerment led them to liberating zones of emancipation, where they could escape the exploitative tendencies of new world patriarchy.

Another similar case study involved migration of unskilled and semi skilled women in response to gender specific demand for labour and while overarching patriarchies were rendered redundant with the expansion of women's education and emancipation, the society witnessed newer formations of sexual exploitation in place of its complete annihilation. Thus the 'Gulf Wives' as they were called migrated in full cognizance and compliance of their families, leaving behind her husband and children only to experience pangs of loneliness and emotional crisis in an alien environment. Such a wife is systematically deprived of her family life while her children are deprived of maternal care, making both the parties victims of patriarchy (see Appadurai 2011; UNESCAP 2003). However, these independent, migrant women often usurp agency and thus experience empowerment in the process of migration as they contribute directly to the economic development of their families, children and relatives and also to their countries of origin and destination. Migration therefore lends them visibility and more power. To conclude in Amba Pande's words:

" It is clearly evident that in spite of many difficulties and constraints, the process of migration and the resultant diasporic conditions, still do offer women—new opportunities and financial independence in addition to the improved status within their homes and communities. Their encounters and contacts with other cultures also empower women by enabling them to become aware of their own repressive conditions, and exposing them to liberating notions of womanhood in different nations. In this process of widening of vision, they also become active in taking up larger issues of women's liberation and gender equality and become catalysts of social change. Participating actively in 'transnational spaces' Indian women have also, now punctured into the male dominated transnational diaspora organizations. We see many contradictions as women encounter and negotiate with multiple conflicting situations from the public and the private spheres of both the homeland and the hostlands, in the process, shifting their perspectives from traditional to contemporary (see Thadani 1984; Pessar and Mahler

2003). It is a complex play, as the nostalgia and the sense of identity makes them adhere to, maybe cling to, Indian traditions and culture on the one hand but on the other diasporic spaces also provides them agency to flirt with new cultures and opportunities”( see Pande 2017)

### **Diasporic literature: An overview**

The term ‘Diaspora’ finds its origin in the pagan and biblical lexicon, where it reverberates with notions of ‘Dispersion’, ‘Exodus’ and ‘Homecoming’ and ‘reclamation. The 20<sup>th</sup> century which has taken in ‘globalization’ as its defining impetus has naturally given rise to a large immigrant population, who has chosen to give vent to their existential crisis, their fragmented consciousness in the form of a differentiated body of literary work known as diasporic literature. As the migrant population moved from one corner of the earth to another for reasons economic, political or social, they encountered a severed existence, a suspended consciousness which led them to the problematic arena of multiple identities, cultural amalgamation and simultaneous disintegration, alienation, rootlessness and pain.

Diasporic literature is a widely inclusive term that includes all literary works written by authors residing outside the country of their birth. It also makes way for second generation crop of expatriates whose writings differentially vary from those of the first generation. Wiliam Safran characterizes Diasporic literature, showcasing immediate immigrant experience, as one of decentred subjectivity, as a documentation of a dispersed population that has lost its centrality and has been relegated to peripheral existence in foreign lands. The second generation migrant consciousness is more reconciled with its fragmented existence and duality of experience and hence their work reflects their passage from the realms of adoption to that of adaption. The expatriate vision is one wrought with plurality, where there is a continuous back and forth passage between ones homeland and adopted land.

Any discussion on Indian Diasporic literature would remain incomplete without the mention of noble laureate Sir V.S. Naipaul whose entire body of work is replete with a sense of ‘homelessness’ and a quest for ‘belonging’. A House for Mr. Biswas, his most iconic work, published in 1961, voices an immigrants longing for acceptance in a foreign land. His opus reflects dissensions and acceptance, contradictions and compromises, a feeling of loss and an urge to belong.

A similar quest for homeland surfaces in Salman Rushdie’s intensely layered writings which not only revolve round the theme of elusive homeland but also grapples with the history of his native land- India. Born practically on the eve of Independence Day, 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1947, Rushdie appropriates the role of midnight’s children who must shoulder the burden of their colonial past and yet must find acceptance in foreign lands. Salman Rushdie’s work brings forth the notion of a mythical homeland, home as a psychological space without a geographical location.

The diasporic writers of late 20<sup>th</sup> century can be differentiated and grouped into two categories according to the diversity of their experiences. The first group would include those who have spent a sizeable part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native experience elsewhere. The other would logically include second generation of expatriates who have been raised since childhood outside India and have no immediate knowledge about the native experience. Their vision is one of an outsider and their plurality all the more convincing as they experience their nativity through the perspective of their immediate family and in extension their expatriate community and reflect a unique vision borne out of multiple perceptions.

An iconic representative of the new Indian Diaspora is Jhumpa Lahiri whose first collection of stories "*Interpreter of Maladies*" was published in 1999 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in the following year. Born of Bengali parents from India, Jhumpa's works reflect the pan-bengali experience, both Indian and Bangladeshi, to decode the diasporic consciousness across cultures and geographies. Her next creative venture, the much acclaimed novel *The Namesake* (2004), successfully analyses the complex aspects of intergenerational gaps between first and second generation immigrants, conflicts between east-west beliefs, the crisis of identity through the trials that Gogol Ganguli, the chief protagonist, encounters while coming to terms with his hyphenated existence of an ABCD, "an American born confused Desi". Lahiri's latest novel *The Lowland*, takes us back to Kolkata of the 1960's and showcases the divergent paths of two brothers, a conflict of ideologies and a reclamation of the past. Kiran Desai, a contemporary of Jhumpa Lahiri, in her second and most recognised novel *An Inheritance of Loss* (2006) traces the struggles of Indian Diaspora along with contiguous issues like globalization, racial intolerance, terrorism and cultural hybridity, to underscore the existential crisis of the modern man.

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Jasmine* depicts the American society in a state of continuous flux. Her protagonist also replicates this perennial motion as she drifts from one identity to another celebrating her myriad images. Thus, she defiantly moves from Jothy to Jasmine to Jazzi, Jase and Jane. She embraces her multiple identities with alacrity and acquires each new one as she moves from one relationship to another.

Other books that display the fragmented consciousness of a generation in a state of perpetual motion are Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, that approaches the diasporic dilemma through magic realism, Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's, *The Mistress of Spices*, Amit Chaudhuri *The Afternoon Raag*.

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