

Chapter 5

Conclusion

After comprehensive comparison of the Indian diasporic fictions by the writers of both the first and second generations in the context of post colonial characteristics, it is concluded that the diasporic writers' individual talents are not necessarily entrenched only in the culture and tradition of a particular society, but his/her real strength also lies in the individual's evocation of the dilemma in terms of his/her quest for identity, alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile, and so on. The style and content of writings by first and second generation diasporic writers differ and are influenced by the extent to which the writers have succeeded in identifying themselves with and adapting to their new host countries. Every major diasporic writer of the first generation covers a wide variety of emotional experiences which are formed with the components such as essence of alienation, assimilation, displacement, adaptation, deracination, alterity, indigeneity, identity crisis, ethnicity/culture, exoticization, nostalgia, etc. The first generation diasporic writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Meena Alexander write about people and their lives which are distinct not only to their homelands but have the fragrance of their host countries. Getting uprooted from the indigenous cultural traditions and values, the loss of native language, sense of being an outcast or an unaccommodated foreigner, collective multiple injuries of the psyche – these are clearly being depicted as the main themes in the writings of these writers. In *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Markandaya, *Manhattan Music* by Meena Alexander and *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* by Anita Desai, we encounter the same trauma, nostalgic reminiscences, quest for self and a sense of being unwanted.

In *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya approaches the theme of confrontation between East and West from a new point of view by depicting the despairing dilemma of the first generation

Indian immigrants in England from pre to post-Independence. In the words of B. Krupakar: “Kamala Markandaya’s novel *The Nowhere Man* ... is a compassionate and distressing tale of an aged Indian immigrant who becomes a martyr to racial hatred” (24). Markandaya artistically presents the dichotomy of the East-West confrontation “which is shown through the undeserved plight of an old and friendly Indian immigrant in England; the portrait of his misery is probably the result of a deep study of the helplessness of Indian expatriates in Britain” (Rao, and Menon 105). The Indo-British interaction is portrayed predominantly through the experiences of the protagonist of this novel, Srinivas, a first generation Indian immigrant in Britain, who is disoriented by the biased mentality of the British community that considered him to be merely a trespasser, an outsider, even after living for half a century in England. Being cut off from his well-grounded cultural and traditional foundations, he tries to get sustenance from his adopted country, but ultimately he tends to feel like a “nowhere man, looking for a nowhere city” (Markandaya 189).

Alexander’s writings depict her life experiences of cultural diversity among various cultural and religious groups of people. In the context of memory, place, and language in identity formation, Alexander’s works study the distinct elements of her legacy and her cultural dislocation. Alexander’s quest for psychic entirety through writings also emphasizes the concerns faced by many postcolonial writers, who are restrained by the dominant literary traditions of the imperial past. In the writings of Alexander, memory plays a unique role as a trope for performance of ever changing immigrant identity, which is also marked by a sense of intimate passions about the body that is implied in her writings as more like a tool or a metaphor or an instrument. *Manhattan Music*, a novel by Alexander, focuses on the increasingly urgent issues of dislocation of migrants, immigrants and diasporans in Western metropolises, as well as

the succeeding unsettling of national, racial and ethnic boundaries. The novel illustrates upon the histories of colonization of India, Africa/America, and the Caribbean and by linking these histories; Alexander successfully embodied them with the story of two female protagonists in the novel. In the novel, Alexander presents a third-world woman protagonist's somatic experiences in New York, that reforming her identity as 'national' or 'transnational' in light of the histories of voluntary or involuntary migration and Alexander also presents her critique of modernity through the protagonist, who escaped fixed subject positions anchored in the histories of immigration and who seek their own subjectivities by exoticizing, romanticizing, and performing hybrid identities other than their own.

Bye-Bye Blackbird, one of the lesser-known works of Anita Desai, is a genuine study of man-woman relationships tormented by cultural encounters. The novel explores the lives of the first generation Indian migrants in quest of a new identity in an alien society of England. Of all the novels by Desai, this novel is the most closely associated to her own experience, as she said in an interview with Atma Ram, "of all my novels *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the most rooted and experienced and the least literary in derivation" (qtd. in Jha 157). She believes, "*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the closest of all my books to actuality – practically everything in it is drawn directly from my experience of living with Indian immigrants in London" (qtd. in Jha 157). The story of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* revolves around three characters - Dev, a short-tempered, pessimistic and ambitious Bengali young man who migrates to England in pursuit of higher studies and aspires not to live in a country where he was insulted and unwanted and wishes to get back to India with the reason of a grand welcome i.e. foreign degree. As against that, Dev's host Adit is a fellow Bengali, who was forced to leave his homeland out of dissatisfaction with his Indian job and settle abroad for a decent income, now living in England with his English wife Sarah for

quite some time. He makes himself believe that he is satisfied with his new life in the adopted land but eventually takes a U-turn towards his homeland and leaves England forever. The third character, Sarah is a calm and flexible woman, who ultimately convinces herself to migrate with her husband to his homeland.

However, those diasporic writers, who have been able to identify themselves with their new geographical environment, especially second generation diasporic writers, procured the bi-cultural perception, which equips them to write from a wider as well as more exciting angle and has widened to a stretch that allows the postcolonial literature to undergo a visible change, depicting issues suitable to the contemporary era rather than conventional ones. This is possible because of the recent prevailing ideas that all the humans are equally deserving of basic human rights; and that there is no any prevalent criteria which can determine the worth of cultures or cultural practices. Another possibility is vital roles played by globalization and cosmopolitanism.

For the second generation diasporic writers, in the changed circumstances of the modern world, what matter now are the small and unacknowledged issues, which had not gained prominence till now. It demonstrates that the inner needs of all human beings are the same and the reactions by Indian, Western, and diasporic characters towards similar situations are found to differ only on the surface. There is a distinct decrease in the intensity in the sense of alienation, identity crisis, nostalgia for homeland, which is witnessed in first generation Indian diasporic writers gradually and frequently. The second generation Indian diasporic writers such as Neil Bissoondath, Hari Kunzru and Jhumpa Lahiri don't cling merely to the conventions of diaspora, as migration experience of their ancestors has become a mere historical event for them or for some well adapted as a part of life. Though alienation is very much a part of the experience of the Indian diaspora, it doesn't mean that people, even if at home in any part of the world, will not

become victims of the sense of alienation. In the prevailing era social alienation is replaced by metaphysical alienation. The second generation Indian diasporic writers increasingly tend towards issues of survival in the recent complex era (the era hard to define and imbibe), self-consciousness, the quest for understanding the self and finding a grasp of one's place in the world, portraying the vacuity of suburban life, a plague of aimlessness and spiritual emptiness that came about from gratuitous comfort and routine in their literature. One could take Betty Friedan's phrase of "the problem that has no name," made famous in her 1963 examination of an ambiguous feminine despair in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, and apply the phrase to the middle-class Americans. People feel lethargic, trapped in routine comfort and inconveniences that leaned to neither extreme, for they are more privileged than their parents or grandparents had ever been, and yet they are miserable.

The focal point of Bissoondath's narratives has frequently been the migrant experiences of displacement, uncertainty, isolation, cultural dislocation, and adaptation, for he has undergone double migration from India to Trinidad to Canada. However his collections of short stories - *Digging Up the Mountains* and *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* - are a major voice in diaspora fiction, which focus more on contemporary themes of cultural displacement, revolution, and the shifting politics of the Third World. There are several characters in *Digging Up the Mountains*, who are Caribbean immigrants in Canada and who are trying to overcome the sense of dislocation, change, subjugation and resettlement. The setting of all the stories of this collection are internal rather than external, wherein all the characters are confronting the fears and frustrations, being trapped in the rootlessness of modern life.

The sense of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity experienced by the immigrants in the host land, the land which they feel they belong to, is witnessed in most of the stories of the collection

- “Digging Up the Mountains”, “Insecurity”, “Christmas Lunch”, etc. In “Digging Up the Mountains”, Bissoondath has narrated the life of Hari, shattered by the shifting politics of the Third World. The story depicts that Hari lived a comfortable life, until political plights worsen due to recent independence and a new government, declaring a state of emergency and making all the right progressive noises. The island’s earlier simplicity was replaced by the contemptuous politics of corruption, friends mysteriously disappeared, and some are shot, leaving behind unknown threatening phone calls and letters for Hari. In “Insecurity” also Bissoondath narrates the story of Alistair Ramgoolam, who is worried and confused about the spoilt situation of his inhabitant island by the substandard politics and corruption, and to protect his children from the insecurities of future, he starts investing his money in other countries. In *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, Bissoondath doesn’t confine merely to the immigrant experience, focused on those from the Caribbean, rather he has moved out from Montreal to Toronto and from Spain to South America to World War II Paris, with the intention of revealing the past experiences of people from every corner of the world. The word ‘uncertainty’, or variations of it, the sense of in-betweenness or unbelonging, the injustice of everyday living, from the inevitability of death to the insidiousness of immigration lawyers and the disrespect of children for their parents, is a common concern in these ten stories. In “On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows”, the seven political refugees, mostly exiles from oppressive regimes, for whom migration into liberal, multi-cultural Canada is beset with profound difficulties and uncertainties. They are desperately waiting to know if their appeal for the position as the immigrant of Canada will be approved or not. In “Security”, Mr. Alistair Ramgoolam, having escaped the political turmoil in his Caribbean island to be with his sons in Canada, purchases a house in Toronto, but he discovers to his dismay that the investment of house in Toronto causes him to feel even more insecure as

realization dawns on him that Toronto signifies a second dislocation for his family. “Security” and another story, “The Power of Reason” also depict the generational conflict between first and second generation diasporic community, as one of the prominent themes.

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri eloquently presents a wide variety of issues which are of contemporary significance. A marked variation is found also in her second collection of stories i.e. *Unaccustomed Earth*. These issues revolve around personal individual crisis and that of nationalities, religion, gender and so on. Thus, Lahiri's stories surpass boundaries by writing beyond our conceptions of those boundaries. The identity of most of the characters in the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* is fluid like other characters in contemporary diasporic writings i.e. their national and cultural identities are not permanent. They are constantly struggling to adjust between the traditions and culture of India that they have abandoned and western world that they have to come across every day. Moreover, they are not strong enough to give a tough fight to the hostile situations, instead they prove to be and fall an effortless prey to the circumstances because the distance from their roots has made them vulnerable. In some of the stories of this collection, such as “Interpreter of Maladies” and “A Temporary Matter”, the contemporary perspective of Lahiri is marked in her definite feminist orientation and portrayal of marriage not as a reliable and fulfilling social and religious institution which is based on mutual love, respect and understanding or as a typical representative of Indian or even emigrant Indian community in general. Such narratives of her raise certain issues about security, reliability, happiness, fulfillment, love, affection, meaningfulness, etc. “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” depicts about the cultural harmonious relation between a Pakistani young man and an Indian family. The story also keeps the issue of the broader adult presuppositions behind the conceptions of nationality and citizenship remains unsettled. “The Third and Final Continent” is

a story of first generation immigrants, strengthening their roots on the alien land, instead of suffering from alienation.

Unaccustomed Earth investigates mostly the highly successful, upper middle class Indian emigrants' experience in America from the point of view of both the first and second generation emigrants. In "Unaccustomed Earth", "Hell-Heaven", "A Choice of Accommodations" and "Only Goodness", Lahiri has vividly portrayed the division between immigrant parents and their American- raised children as well as emptiness of first generation in relationship with their parents. These stories also deal with the loss of national traditions as one of the prominent themes. In "Only Goodness", the serious issues of alcoholism and the destruction of a family caused by it, are depicted in light of Asian Indian people in host country, for whom success is measured on how they can accomplish higher education, how they can make money from prominent workplaces, and how they choose the wives or husbands. As a minority community in host country, hard work and nurturing a prideful new generation are essential values for first generation Asian Indians. However, in transferring these values to the new generation, there is bound to irrupt the conflict between both the generations. The story "Hema and Kaushik" depicts the life span of Hema and Kaushik, two US-born descendants of Bengali immigrants from adolescence to early middle age. It focuses on the way in which the death of the elderly near ones at an early age bears on the destinies of both the protagonists. This death opens the possibilities of a new generational sense of investigating the relation between mourning and melancholia.

Kunzru's second novel, *Transmissions*, diverts its focus from the imperialism of the British Empire to our contemporary world, which is dominated by a different, but identically devastating type of empire, that of controlling, globalized and transnational corporate

world. The novel depicts various aspects of the interconnected globalizing world: opportunities and insecurities produced by the globalization through the characters of the professional wanderers like Arjun and Guy. It narrates a global association and dissociation of disparate destinies, about the global vagabonds of nowhere and everywhere, about the confrontation of virtual cybernetic world and the real world. The prominent theme of the novel is the investigation of uncertainty and fears of a contemporary man at an individual as well as collective level. The main character of the novel is Arjun Mehta and his act of worldwide spread of virus on computer can be interpreted as the remonstrance by a man of today against discriminating treatment and economic opportunities, craving for acceptance and vain efforts to find one's place in the world, fear of becoming a social exile and a devastated life.

Thus, this research is an endeavour to bring out the altered psyche of a (im) migrant with the help of the fictions by first and second generation Indian diasporic writers, defining and examining the generation gap and its consequences. To conclude, it can be observed that the routes are altered to approach the ultimate destination of contentment and peace of mind in the two generations of diasporic writing. While there is a lot of anguish and nostalgia in the first generation, the second generation literature is more positive and assertive in their acceptance of their host land. The quote from a short story "The Third and Final Continent" by Jhumpa Lahiri clearly depicts the situation:

Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years...

(Lahiri, *Interpreter* 197-198)

Works cited

- Alexander, Meena. *Manhattan Music*. California: Mercury House, 1997. Print.
- Bissoondath, Neil. *Digging Up the Mountains*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986. Print.
- . *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1990. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2012. Print.
- Jha, Kanhaiya Jee. "Colonial Consciousness and Racial Conflict: An Analysis of Immigrant Experience in Anita Desai's *Bye, Bye Blackbird*." *Indian English Literature, Volume 6*. Ed. Basavaraj Naikar. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007. 157-167. Print.
- Krupakar, B. "Race Relations and The Nowhere Man." *The Literary Endeavour* 2.2-3 (1980): 21-26. Print.
- Kunzru, Hari. *Transmission*. New York: Penguin Group, 2004. Print.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004. Print.
- . *Unaccustomed Earth*. Noida: Random House Publishers, 2012. Print.
- Markandaya, Kamala. *The Nowhere Man*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2012. Print.
- Rao, Krishna A.V, and Madhavi Menon. K. *Kamala Markandaya: A Critical Study of Her Novels, 1954-1982*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1997. Print.