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DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

Palla Mária

Representations of Transcultural Communities in Postcolonial Literature:
Problematizing Identity in South Asian Diasporic Writing in Britain and Canada
in the 1980s and the 1990s

*Transzkulturális közösségek ábrázolása Kanadában és Angliában–identitás-
problémák a dél-ázsiai diaszpóra posztkoloniális irodalmában az 1980-as és az
1990-es években*

Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola
A Doktori Iskola vezetője: Dr. Lukács István DSc, egyetemi tanár

Modern Angol–Amerikai Irodalom és Kultúra doktori program
A program vezetője: Dr. Ferencz Győző PhD, egyetemi tanár

A bizottság elnöke:
Dr. Dávidházi Péter MHAS, egyetemi tanár

Hivatalosan felkért bírálók:
Dr. Kenyeres János PhD, habilitált egyetemi docens
Dr. Molnár Judit CSc, habilitált egyetemi docens

A bizottság további tagjai:
Dr. Czigányik Zsolt PhD, egyetemi adjunktus, a bizottság titkára
Dr. Juhász Tamás PhD, egyetemi docens
Dr. Ferencz Győző PhD, egyetemi tanár (póttag)
Dr. Szalay Krisztina CSc, egyetemi docens (póttag)

Témavezető:
Dr. Takács Ferenc PhD, ny. egyetemi docens

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A témavezető neve és tudományos fokozata: Dr Takács Ferenc PhD

A témavezető munkahelye: ELTE BTK nyugalmazott egyetemi docense

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a doktori értekezés szerzőjének aláírása

Absztrakt

A migráció és vele kapcsolatban a nemzeti hovatartozás és az identitás kérdései, a kulturális gyökerek, valamint a migráció során választott utak és irányuk egyre nagyobb gyakorisággal kerültek különböző irodalmi művek tematikus fókuszába a huszadik század utolsó két évtizedének változó intellektuális közegében. Az 1980-as és 90-es évek ide sorolható fejleményeként jelent meg a korszak vonatkozó változásaira adott válaszként a diaszpóra-elmélet is, mely a diaszpóra-kritikával együtt a jelen értekezés fő tárgyát képező, Nagy-Britanniában és Kanadában egyre nagyobb súllyal jelentkező multikulturális irodalom vizsgálatának fontos elméleti megközelítését alapozta meg.

A diaszpóra-irodalom alkotóinak és kritikusainak a jelzett korszakban már-már nyomasztó mérvű termékenysége indokolja, hogy az értekezés ezen irodalmi alkotások egy kezelhető, ugyanakkor reprezentatívnak mondható szegmensére, egész pontosan a dél-ázsiai diaszpóra öt jellegzetes irodalmi képviselőjének az említett korszakban keletkezett műveire fókuszál. A vizsgált szövegtörzset áttekinthető terjedelemben történő szűkítésének céljából az értekezés az India modernkori államának területéről származó diaszpórák vizsgálatára szorítkozik, különös tekintettel a szikh, a muszlim, a párszi, és a hindu népcsoportokra, melyek mindegyikét egy vagy két író képviseli. Az elemzett művek, melyek tárgyalási sorrendje nagyjából a megjelenés időrendjét követi, a következők: az *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987), Ravinder Randhawa Angliában elsőnek megjelent regénye, a *The Satanic Verses* (1988) Salman Rushdie tollából, a *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), melynek szerzője, Rohinton Mistry történetesen a ma Mumbai nevet viselő Bombay-ban, tehát Rushdie szülővárosában született, mégpedig az *A Wicked Old Woman* írójával, Ravinder Randhawával egyazon évben, de velük ellentétben Mistry irodalmi pályáját Kanadában kezdte meg; a

további két elemzett mű Anita Rau Badami *Tamarind Mem* (1996) című, első regénye és az *English Lessons and Other Stories* (1995) c. kötet Shauna Singh Baldwin tollából.

Ennek az egyértelműen körülhatárolt szépirodalmi és a hozzá kapcsolódó kritikai szövegtörzshöz a körültekintő elemzése megfelelő alapot adhat annak megállapításához, hogy milyen körülmények tették lehetővé a vizsgálatba vont irodalmi szövegtípus hirtelen felvirágzását, biztosítva a diaszpóra-tematikájú regénytípus máig megőrzött előkelő helyét az elbeszélőpróza világában. Az olyan összetett jelenségek szépirodalmi szempontú megértése, mint a migráció, a transzkulturáció és a diaszpóra, a kulturális identitás, a hibriditás, a haza és az emlékezet kérdéseinek vizsgálatát teszi szükségessé, így e kérdéscsoportok képezik a dolgozat egyes fejezeteinek tematikus magját. Az e kérdésekhez köthető elméleti megközelítések ismertetése alkotja az értekezés első szerkezeti egységét, amit a releváns szociokulturális tudnivalók ismertetése egészít ki utóbb a műelemző fejezetekben abból a célból, hogy az egyes fejezetek elején konkrétabb háttérismeretek támogassák meg a tárgyalt kötetek szoros szövegolvasás formájában elvégzett elemzését. Ezen vizsgálódás eredményei magyarázattal hivatottak szolgálni általában a diaszpóra-diszkurzus és konkrétan a diaszpóra-irodalom mind a mai napig tartó folyamatos jelenlétére és népszerűségére.

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Introduction

Although migration is not a new, exclusively twenty-first century phenomenon, the scale on which it takes place today concerning both its geographical expansion and the number as well as the variety of people involved has never been seen before. What is most obviously new is the means used for movement: cheaper and faster travel has definitely had an important role to play in creating this situation of quantum growth, but the speed at which information reaches people in the cyberspace should not be underestimated as a factor in it, either. The increasingly popular and widespread forms of the social media on the Internet allow rapid communication to develop literally without borders, spreading news and lessening the fears of isolation from the known, that is, the severance of ties to friends and family, the cultures and traditions of the smaller and the larger ethnic and national communities one belongs to in the homeland. Mobile communication also offers opportunities for migrants to remain in touch with those left behind while making it possible for them to establish new contacts even if they do not want to leave the four walls of their new homes in the host countries.

No wonder that the migration of people and the resulting processes of transculturation have received growing attention over the past few decades beginning in the 1980s. Migration studies have become an area of research among scholars from various disciplines due to its manifold implications for social cohesion, economic development, environmental change and, most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, for theoretical analyses and the literary representation of the contemporary human condition. Migration and the related questions of roots, routes, belonging and identity started to feature large as thematic foci of literary works more and more frequently in the changed intellectual climate of the last two decades of the twentieth century. It was in the 1980s and the 1990s that diaspora studies emerged, aiming to specifically address such issues and diaspora criticism also became a theoretical tool

employed to study the ever more prolific field of multicultural writing in England and Canada, the two locations that this dissertation focuses on. Due to the virtually overwhelming productivity of diasporic writers as well as their critics in the period surveyed, the present study concentrates on the works of a manageable, and in many ways representative, amount of work produced by five selected writers dating from the designated era. A careful examination of such a clearly defined body of primary and secondary sources promises to offer sufficient grounds for identifying the conditions that facilitated the boom of this kind of writing while creating conditions in which diaspora-related novels and short stories have been able to remain a prevalent category of fiction to this day. To understand what is at stake in the complex phenomena of migration, transculturation and diaspora for literary narratives, questions of cultural identity, hybridity, home, and memory will be addressed as relevant thematic nodes in the chapters to come. A review of pertinent theoretical approaches to these issues provided at the beginning of the dissertation will be followed by a survey of socio-cultural data in order to provide a more specific context at the beginning of each chapter devoted to the close reading of the individual volumes. In the course of this examination some explanations are to be offered as to the lasting presence and popularity of diaspora discourse in general and diasporic literary representations in particular.

The sometimes bewildering complexity of migrant and diasporic existence as reflected in the works to be commented on below results from multifarious causes including, among them, what are known as the “pull and push factors”. There are those for whom the defining motive is the search for adventure, others seek material gains, while there are those for whom finding safety away from the crises in the homeland is the main concern. There are people whose movement is primarily motivated by the unbearable conditions in the home society caused by war, religious prosecution, inter-ethnic conflicts, famine, natural disasters, poverty, the lack of opportunities, or their combination of these circumstances. However, the origins of

the global village, as “our single constricted” world was famously described by Marshal McLuhan (31), can be traced back to the inherent curiosity of humankind about the unexplored as well as material interests fostering labour relations and trade worldwide, which have often resulted in some kind of hegemonic relationship. It was often during colonial enterprises that people of different cultures, religions and languages were brought in close contact with each other. The voluntary migration of the colonizers was accompanied with the forced dispersal of those oppressed during the conquest on several occasions in human history and that is how the first “expatriate minority communities” better known today as diasporas appeared (Safran 83), the Jewish diaspora being its prototype, as early as the sixth century BC when the Jews were deported and subsequently dispersed in a series of events known as the Babylonian Captivity for the first time in their centuries-long history of enforced dislocation.

Since then the meaning of the term diaspora has expanded: on the whole, there has been an increase in its possible interpretations to classify more people as diasporans even at the danger of emptying the term of meaning sometimes. That explains Fortier’s words of warning in her essay against the danger of using the term diaspora as simply “another way of speaking of cultural cosmopolitanism, thus emptying it of its political and historical density” (32). As it is demonstrated in Chapter 1 below, there have been numerous attempts made to offer an exact definition, to set up typologies or, conversely, to argue for the abandonment of all efforts at achieving terminological precision and consistency altogether. The derivation of the term diaspora often serves as a starting point of such discussions. As its etymology is customarily explained, this word of Greek origin “derives from the verb *diaspeirein*, a compound of ‘dia’ (over or through) and ‘speirein’ (to scatter or sow). . . . In all of its various uses, diaspora has something to do with scattering and dispersal” (Kenny 2). While Kenny’s explanation here focuses on the traumatic aspect of the diaspora experience as migration, living in exile from the homeland and feeling displaced in the host country, Susheila Nasta

adds a more positive note, the idea of settlement and new beginnings to it as implied in the agricultural metaphor of sowing present in the term's etymology (7). In this way, diaspora provides an opportunity, on the one hand, to examine intercultural relations in terms of the binary of the homeland and the host country, even though due to extensive theorization diaspora is also understood today as a phenomenon which is multilocational, or rhizomatic, in nature. On the other hand, the benefits as well as the losses involved in the process of settlement and acculturation in an adopted land can be scrutinized in the framework of diaspora. Consequently, Kenny's proposition holds true: "Diaspora is best approached not as a social entity that can be measured but as an idea that helps explain the world migration creates" (1).

It is also an imaginary world of the mind that diasporic writers have envisioned in their works refashioning "traditional definitions of literary canons, identities and genres" (Merolla and Ponzanesi 1) influenced by their fragmented and disjointed experience of moving between multiple locations. At the same time, their endeavours to adapt to the new places of settlement have also had an impact on their diasporic consciousness changing the connotations of their writing "from being related to origins, centrality, and authenticity to an increased awareness of its endless iteration and transformation" (Merolla and Ponzanesi 1).

More recently, the term transnationalism has often appeared alongside, or instead of, diaspora. Quayson and Daswani argue that the former has a broader meaning incorporating migrant groups which "may not be derived primarily or indeed exclusively from the forms of co-ethnic and cultural identification that are constitutive of diasporas, but rather from elective modes of identification involving class, sexuality, and even professional interest" (4). Thus, diaspora becomes a subset of transnationalism in their interpretation.

Brazier and Mannur insist on further distinctions between diaspora and transnationalism when they explain how transnationalism is a larger category for them, too. In

their view, “[t]ransnationalism may be defined as the flow of people, ideas, goods, and capital across national territories in a way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization, and political constitution” (8). But while diaspora refers to the movement of people in particular, transnationalism is about “larger, more impersonal forces—specifically, those of globalization and global capitalism” (Brazier and Mannur 8). There are also those who explicitly express a preference for the newer term: “[d]iaspora’ was appropriate at a time in human history when, if populations left a location of origin, it was difficult for them to return . . . I think some of us prefer the notion of transnationality as opposed to diaspora, a sense of continuing relationships with the location of origin” (Lim qtd. in Gunew 108).

Together with the concept of transnationalism, the term, and the underlying phenomenon, of transculturality has also gained currency more recently as a result of diverse cultural encounters becoming more and more common in our world. In this sense, diaspora is also a site of transculturation because of its potential to accommodate heterogeneous cultures and because of its flexibility and fluidity, which allow for the meeting and mixing of cultures as opposed to alternative models of coexistence which prioritise individuals and communities having a single and homogeneous culture. Therefore, hybridity and transculturality are both useful concepts to examine questions of diasporic identity because “the concept of transculturality has the advantage of recognising change and diversity, rather than focusing on boundaries or differences” (Nordin et al. 11).

From the above, it is obvious that although diaspora denotes a social-historical process, it is more than that as attested to by the interdisciplinary nature of diaspora studies. It is not only a field for social scientists and historians but also cultural and literary critics. It was with the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism that a major shift occurred in the paradigm of diaspora criticism in the late 1980s and the 1990s when the traditionally accepted

historical, ethnic-territorial approach was supplemented with a more theoretically oriented slant. Some cultural theoreticians, such as Paul Gilroy in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, regard diaspora as an apt metaphor with which to examine the modern condition characterized, first and foremost, by fluidity, polycentricity and intersectionality. For them, diaspora is a space without fixed borders offering opportunities to create new forms of knowledge and to enjoy aesthetic freedom. This is a site, therefore, where cultural interactions and the forces inflecting identity formation can be effectively scrutinized. Those most interested in theorizing diaspora “see migrancy in terms of adaptation and construction – adaptation to changes, dislocations and transformations, and the construction of new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing the world” (Shackleton ix). To facilitate the examination of such topics in this dissertation, the major concerns of diaspora theory and the major tropes of diasporic writing are surveyed in Chapter 1 making use of John McLeod’s critique of diaspora theories. He regards the theme of identity as a key preoccupation. To understand it, he deems it necessary to define such conceptual terms as ‘hybridity’, ‘borders’, ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘cultural diversity’ (*Beginning* . . . 141) – issues to be taken up in the next chapter below.

There are theoreticians who eagerly celebrate the migrant experience such as Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*. He claims that “liberation as an intellectual mission . . . has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentred, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant” (403). True, it transpires from his occasional remarks that he is also aware of the dangers implied in making such homogenizing statements, but other critics warn about the limitations involved in them much more emphatically when describing them as “significant limitations which dehistoricize and elide important questions of class, gender and cultural difference” (Nasta 4).

Socio-cultural contextualization is a means to avoid such dangers in the present study; to do so, it examines one particular selection of diasporic writers who can be grouped together under the label South Asian. Of the multiple destinations of these migrant communities, Britain and Canada will be focused upon. One reason for such a geographical choice is the recognition of the major role attributed to London, the Western metropolitan centre, and the former heart of the British Empire. The choice of Canada, admittedly a subjective one in part, is a choice having to do with my decades-long dedication to Canadian Studies. There is, however, a less personal consideration too behind selecting the largest North American country and its culture as my second point of orientation. Examining the diasporic literature of a Canadian provenance promises to provide a counterpoint to my explorations of relevant British phenomena, Canada having emerged as a one-time settler colony, on the one hand, and the country being a contemporary multicultural state both on the level of everyday reality and in terms of official policy, on the other. It is of particular interest in this connection that the policy of multiculturalism was introduced in Canada by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau as early as 1971 and was enacted as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988 – earlier than any similar policy to be adopted anywhere else in the world.

The United Kingdom and Canada, these two destinations of immigration, were significant for different reasons. Britain was attractive for a long time as the (former) mother country, while Canada was one of the locations intra-colonial travellers headed for, within the British Empire, as “transverse migrations around the edges of empire” (Quayson 144) were quite common. Nowadays migration from India to Britain and Canada is part of what Quayson and Gishwani call “the movement from the global south to the global north” (11). Due to the implications of their shared colonial past, the South Asian diasporas in both countries can also be called postcolonial ones today.

Granted, colonization was a different experience in the two states: while Britain was the supreme colonizing power, the imperial centre, Canada was one of the white settler colonies on the imperial margins. The arrival of South Asian immigrants in ever growing numbers, therefore, affected the two societies differently, which, in their turn, offered dissimilar conditions of settlement. When the new arrivals began to appear on the literary scene of these two countries, their publications had a different impact on the culture of the respective host societies. In the divergent reception of the two kinds of immigrant literature in the respective countries, questions of national and ethnic identities have always had disparate corollaries because of the historical contexts and ideologies. Of these, multiculturalism has been playing a particularly important part more recently, a phenomenon which has developed in distinct ways in the two states. The following chapters, therefore, highlight the immigrants' alternative ways of settlement and socio-cultural integration in the two countries while pointing out features held in common, too.

In order to limit the scope of examination to comprehensible dimensions, only diasporic communities from the modern state of India are studied here, with special attention to the Sikh, Muslim, Parsi, and Hindu groups, each represented by one or two of the five authors whose works are to be discussed. These authors are Ravinder Randhawa, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Rau Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin. The diverse religious-cultural backgrounds of these five novelists manifest in their fiction are a reflection of the heterogeneity of their ancestral homeland as well as the South-Asian diaspora. As it will be seen, this is a global diaspora with a long history of migration and settlement in foreign territories, a history within which the contemporary postcolonial era has been selected here. However, the five authors do not only exemplify the ethno-religious diversity of the South-Asian diaspora but also reflect gender differences, with two of them being male and

three of them female. They appear to be contemporaries based on their dates of birth, but whether they belong to the same generation in literary history, too, is a question to ponder.

Although all five of the novelists selected for this study were born in India, they will be grouped together as South Asians here because that is the more frequently used and all-encompassing term preferred these days. South Asian as a designation is a contested one, however, since it does not refer to any shared historical, religious or linguistic traditions or national-political orientations. South Asia is the home of at least five world religions: Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and Christianity, while it includes five or more nation-states, depending on the definitions of different political institutions or academic departments. The five countries unanimously included are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. It is because of this heterogeneity that Pnina Werbner categorizes the South Asian diaspora as a “complex or segmented” one (76).

The situation of the South Asian diaspora is further complicated by the fact that it also includes twice-displaced people among its members. As Vijay Mishra demonstrates, members of the old, nineteenth-century indenture diaspora (that is, displaced groups of labourers bound to their employment by enforced contracts) from places like Fiji, Africa or the Caribbean islands such as Trinidad “become part of the ‘new’ [twentieth-century metropolitan] diaspora through re-migrations” (V. Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 3). The highly renowned author M. G. Vassanji is one such twice-displaced South Asian diasporan: having grown up as a child of Indian ancestry in Kenya and Tanzania, he went to study in the United States before settling down in Canada in 1978 (Marshall). It is not surprising that when talking about his self-identification, it is a question he asks first in the title of his essay: “Am I a Canadian Writer?” (7) While using the designation South Asian diaspora, this dissertation appears to focus on the original home of this large group of people. In contrast, Vassanji’s question directs the reader’s attention to the host country of the

diasporan. But Vassanji quickly resolves the seeming conflict here when he claims: “We are essentially exiles, yet our home is Canada, because home is the past and the present, as also the future. We belong to several worlds and Canada has given us a home, an audience, a hospitality, a warm embrace” (11). This description provides an apt view of the diasporic situation located between the home left behind and the home to be adopted. Consequently, by this point in the essay it has become obvious that the pronoun “we”, for Vassanji, means immigrants like himself as well as their communities. This becomes clear from the way he continues his assessment:

not only are there so many of us, we also have entire communities here, consisting of people who have shared our experiences; we are telling the stories not only of there, but also for people here. We are bringing the stories here to accompany those who have arrived here. . . . These stories are not only for their consumption; they are not for nostalgia; they are their history, describe their being. And therefore they are for their future generations as well. (11)

This passage confirms the view gradually emerging in Vassanji’s essay that these immigrants are there to stay in Canada, which is the place that they belong to now, where they are being accommodated. Although Vassanji distances himself from being a champion of official multiculturalism through his acerbic remarks on those who want to fit in by mindlessly occupying immigrant positions assigned to them in this framework, his closing remarks do assert the acceptance of the plurality that multiculturalism fosters and recognises diversity as part of the essence of Canada:

The idea I am putting forward is that new Canadians bring their stories with them, and these stories then become Canadian stories. . . . The stories of the Jewish Holocaust,

the holocausts in Rwanda, the Partition of India, and the massacres of Cambodia are also Canadian stories. (12)

The essay ends on a note of qualified optimism asserting as the conclusion does that Vassanji can in fact regard himself as a Canadian writer in his adopted home without his being obliged to accept any undue compromises. It does not eventually seem to be necessary for him to abandon his ancestral culture in order to find a home for himself in the new land; the frustration over the question of belonging might eventually be resolved.

Returning to the question of the applicability of the designation South Asian to cover diasporic writers from the Indian sub-continent, it can be stated that superficially, the term may simply seem to refer to a common geographical place of origin or, in another sense, it may appear as a device to pigeonhole these writers. But like any label used in literary history, it provides readers and critics with a useful means to distinguish them from other groups of diasporic writers. Vassanji himself in the article discussed above applies this label to identify his background. Additionally, South Asian appears to be a frequently used category in studies of diasporic British as well as Canadian writing, as it is broad enough to include authors of different religions and ethnicities, sometimes from one and the same country, as well as authors sharing the same mother tongue but not the same nationality, without critics having to invent a multiplicity of designations to study them. At the same time, Werbner also convincingly argues that even members of such a complex diaspora come from the same cultural region of consumption because they enjoy “similar cultural preoccupations, tastes, cuisines, music, sport, poetry, fashion and popular cinema” (76). They are in contrast with the archetypal Jewish diaspora in that their religious and cultural orientations do not coincide with the bounded territories of their homeland; yet, by sharing a culture of consumption, they create “public arenas and economic channels for cooperation and communal enjoyment,

which *cut across the national origins or religious beliefs of performers and participants*” (Werbner 76).

In North America, in particular, the designation South Asian came into use in the wake of the Second World War, when the “academic and policy elites [of the United States] sought to map the world in terms of a series of contiguous regions” (Giri and Kumar 13). Afterwards, terms like this were adopted by institutions of higher education when area studies were introduced as an interdisciplinary field. Then the sending region’s political elites adopted the term, which thus “became a category of self-definition” (Giri and Kumar 13), only to be employed by the diasporas of South Asian origin in the West, too. Giri and Kumar explain this phenomenon as a way of creating “solidarity, neighborliness, and hospitality with others from the region” by emphasizing their common roots (13).

It comes as no surprise then that all the five South Asian diasporic writers whose volumes are to be examined below negotiate the questions of identity, although they use various strategies in doing so. They all became renowned literary figures during the late 1980s and 1990s, some of them publishing their first books then. It was the time when diaspora suddenly began to attract the attention of more scholars from the social sciences and the humanities than before. Earlier, assimilation was taken for granted, but now the socio-political conditions and the intellectual climate changed making it easier for new immigrants to retain their cultural heritage while sojourning in a new country. This became a period of great productivity in the field of diaspora studies with defining texts produced by critics and authors alike. All five novelists under discussion are also first generation immigrants in their respective host countries choosing to write in English, though they also divert from standard English to varying degrees to suit their needs in order to express their diasporic position on a discursive level, too.

The critic James F. English also confirms the importance of the time period from which the two novels set completely or partly in London have been selected for scrutiny. He observes that several scholars from various disciplines published significant works from the mid-1980s onwards pointing “to the 1970s as the fulcrum point [sic] of a decisive historical shift,” (1) which involved, among other things, “the rapid proliferation of new identities, new ethnicities” in British society, resulting in “the emergence of a postmodern, postindustrial, postcolonial, and postnational era” (English 2) in Britain. An unmistakable sign of a dramatic change in politics, not necessarily progressive in character, was the formation of the first Thatcher-government in 1979; as for the literary scene, it was in the 1980s that English literature became increasingly destabilized and fragmented mainly due to the publication of a growing number of significant works by diasporic and postcolonial writers, which also began to enter the syllabi of university English departments marking a change in the literary canon, too.

Ravinder Randhawa and Salman Rushdie belong to these diasporic writers from Britain. Randhawa emigrated, as a seven-year old child, from India in 1959. Like Rushdie, she was educated in Britain and gained fame in the same decade as Rushdie. Similarly to her protagonist, an immigrant in Britain in *A Wicked Old Woman*, the first novel Randhawa published in 1987, she comes from a Sikh background. “It is the first novel by a woman set within England’s Asian community—in this case Indian and Pakistani” (183) says Bruce King highlighting the significance of Randhawa’s novel in British literary history. The importance for the author of her ethnic ties to the South Asian British diaspora is highlighted by the fact that in 1984, even before the appearance of her first novel, she founded the Asian Women Writers’ Workshop, later called Asian Women Writers’ Collective, which put out two major collections contributing to the multicultural diversification of British literature in the 1980s (King 131). As a South Asian British woman, she belongs to a group that was doubly

marginalized based on gender and colour. This group was invisible and silenced for a long time since most South Asian diasporic women were confined primarily to domestic roles.

Salman Rushdie is an indispensable literary figure whose work is an integral part of, and a major milestone in, the world of contemporary diasporic writing. Being the only son in an affluent, liberal Muslim family, Rushdie arrived in England in 1961, at the age of fourteen, to start his secondary education in the prestigious Rugby School and then to go on to university in Cambridge. Although Rushdie started his literary career in 1975, it was his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses*, published in 1988, in which he first introduced Indian immigrant characters, including the protagonists Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who keep traversing the boundaries between Bombay and London in various senses of the word. It was also the first time that Rushdie chose London as a setting; actually, most of the plot takes place there, which allows him to explore the numerous ways in which members of the South Asian British diasporic community engage in a search of meaningful negotiations of their inter-cultural, hybrid position.

In Canada, Rohinton Mistry, born, incidentally, in Rushdie's native city of Bombay, now Mumbai and in the same year as Randhawa, embarked on a literary career in the same decade as these two authors gained recognition, publishing his first book entitled *Tales from Firozsha Baag* in 1987, a collection of eleven short stories that came out under the title *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories* in the United Kingdom later. However, it was his first novel *Such a Long Journey* that garnered him Canada's most prestigious literary prize, the Governor-General's Award for English-language fiction in 1991, drawing critical and popular attention to the author and his characters of Parsi background. Significantly, the place name in the title of the collection of stories awakens curiosity as to its exact meaning, which is soon found out upon opening the book. It refers to an imaginary compound in Bombay inhabited by Parsis. It is this ethno-religious community, which happens to be Mistry's own, that the

writer examines and presents a totally different slice of the city of Bombay's life than Rushdie does.

Although Mistry and Randhawa were both born in 1952, unlike Randhawa, Mistry did not leave India before completing his university education, arriving in Canada as an adult, which may explain his different diasporic attitude. The importance attributed to the location and the language in which a diasporic writer receives his or her education as to the choices, linguistic as well as aesthetic and thematic, he later makes as an author is also emphasized by Katalin Kürtösi when comparing the literary output of poets in the Hungarian-Canadian diaspora (155). Some of Mistry's chief concerns in his early work also seem to confirm Bruce King's general observation that "[t]he early focus of immigrant writing is nostalgia, memories of a now idealized past, assertions of the self and culture" (6), even though the memories he presents in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are far from being idealized. In this way, he provides ample space to show his Parsi characters in their original home in Bombay leaving no doubts about their ethnic identity.

Anita Rau Badami also arrived in Canada as an adult emigrating there with her husband and son in 1991. Her first novel *Tamarind Mem*, or *Tamarind Woman* as it was titled in later American editions, appeared in 1996. Remembering the ancestral home in India and recreating the past are key features of this novel, too, although the ethnic identification is less prominent. The reader does find out that the narrators Kamini and her mother Saroja are of Hindu background, but it is the gender aspect as well as the generational differences affecting diasporic writing that are in Badami's focus.

The last book to be examined in the dissertation is Shauna Singh Baldwin's *English Lessons and Other Stories* published in 1995. Like her main characters, Baldwin is of Sikh descent. While she unmistakably identifies her characters' ethnicity, migrancy as well as inhabiting border zones, literally and metaphorically, plays an equally dominant role in their

lives as it does in the trajectories of Rushdie's characters. Similarly to Salman Rushdie, she herself is more of a global citizen: she was born in Montreal in 1962, yet, was raised in India only to return to North America in the early 1990s eventually to settle down in the United States while retaining her Canadian citizenship. As her characters also keep travelling back and forth between their adopted and home land, North America and India, in her case, it is not the physical border-crossings that create tensions but the cultural and generational differences that need to be negotiated in both places.

The temporal framework in the Canadian part of the dissertation is a later period than it is in the section dealing with British diasporic writing. That is due to the fact that the demographic shift bringing more non-European immigrants mainly from South Asia and the Caribbean to Canada occurred later than in Britain. It was not until the 1960s that new immigration laws in Canada eliminated overt racial discrimination and introduced a point system, which rationalized the admission procedures (Van Dyk). Coincidentally, in Britain, the same decade was the time when the first two restrictive Immigration Acts aiming to keep out prospective Black and Asian immigrants from Britain were passed (Nasta 276). Changes made in the opposite direction in Canada led to a significant growth in the number of the South Asian diasporans making them the largest visible minority group in Canada comprising 1.9 million people in 2016, according to Statistics Canada ("Census Profile"). Consequently, the recognition of these ethnic groups on the literary scene also happened later in Canada. As Mariam Pirbhai observes, "South Asian Canadian literature, as a category of study, came into being in the 1980s, becoming the object of vigorous critical attention until the late 1990s" (8).

South Asians were not the only ethnic community to make their voices heard and thus contribute to the emergence of multicultural writing in Canada. Coral Ann Howells states,

1996 was the year when the new wave peaked, with new multicultural novels being published by the big international presses, symptomatic of the shift in Canadian fiction away from national to international focus and marketing. These novels may be representative of a trend, yet these writers speak from a wide variety of individual perspectives” (“Writing by Women” 209).

As mentioned earlier, 1996 was the year when Badami’s *Tamarind Mem* was published, but this year also saw the publication of a significant new novel, entitled *A Fine Balance*, by the fellow South Asian Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry. In 1996 books by other prominent Canadian authors of various ethnic backgrounds appeared, too. Among these multicultural authors there were Janice Kulyk Keefer of Ukrainian descent and Yann Martel, of a French-Canadian background, born in Spain but brought up in diverse countries all over the world ranging from Costa Rica to France, an author who had yet to win the Booker Prize with a later novel, the *Life of Pi*, whose film adaptation was awarded four Oscars. It was also the year when the acclaimed novelist Guy Vanderhaeghe won the Governor General’s Award for Fiction in English the second time for his *The Englishman’s Boy*, published that same year. Incidentally, Margaret Atwood, probably the best known mainstream Canadian writer living today, also came out with a new novel, *Alias Grace* that year.

The 1990s marked a peak period in the history of diaspora criticism as well. That it was an extremely productive time in the field is illustrated by the publication of at least six major studies in the single year of 1996 (S. Mishra 83) with such iconic texts among them as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” R. Radhakrishnan’s *Diasporic Meditations: Between Home and Location* and Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*; one might also add *New National and Post-*

Colonial Literatures, a selection of essays edited by Bruce King, some of which explicitly address issues of diasporas, exiles and expatriates, as shall be seen later.

Although writing by and about diasporas reveals enormous variety, there seems to be critical consensus that one of the key preoccupations in the field concerns collective as well as individual identity as related to race and culture. The present dissertation attempts to undertake such an examination in the volumes, one by each, of the selected South Asian authors. Due to their cultural diversity, there will be ample opportunity to interrogate questions of belonging, negotiations of a liminal space, and experiences of interstitiality or intersectionality. The five authors employ different discursive techniques, too, demonstrating with that as well that life spent inhabiting a borderland has immense rewards for their readers, too.

Chapter 1: Diasporas and Their Literary Output

1.1 The Evolution of Diaspora/s: From Lived Experience to Concept

As it has already been explained, the word diaspora was used for a long time to refer exclusively to the traumatic experiences of the Jewish people forced into exile in foreign lands during their history, although there had been other people who lived in diasporic conditions such as the Levantine Nabatheans, the Phenicians or the Assyrians in ancient times before them (Sheffer qtd. in Anteby and Berthomière 263). The word was first used by Sophocles, Herodotus and Thucydides in the fifth century BC and was later adopted by Jewish scholars in Alexandria around 250 BC, who translated from Hebrew into Greek the Septuagint containing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the five books of the Torah, describing the Jewish dispersal, among other things (Kenny 3). The word diaspora appeared twelve times in the translation where it “always meant the threat of dispersion facing the Hebrews if they failed to obey God’s will, and it applied almost exclusively to divine acts” (Dufoix 4).

The word gained more widespread currency when its definition started to be enlarged in the 1960s to become a generic term later. It was in his talk at a conference held in 1965 that the historian George Shepperson also applied it to people of African origin (Tölölyan 648), though he was not the first person to draw parallels between the Jewish and the black African dispersions and to highlight the similarities between them by means of applying the word diaspora, too. Shared characteristics of the Jewish and the African diasporas had been pointed out as early as the 1910s but it only became common to refer to this analogy in the 1950s and 1960s (Dufoix 12-3). This extension of the meaning of diaspora was due “to a change in the prestige of the term, which once connoted deracination, sorrow, and powerlessness” (648),

explains Kachig Tölölyan, the founding editor of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, inaugurated in 1991. This journal was instrumental in consolidating diaspora studies as a discipline.

The term diaspora has been deemed expedient ever since, similarly to the field of study associated with it in our age of global population flows, at a time when migration involves more numerous people and from more varied cultures than ever before. “According to the UN in 2008, there were some 214 million international migrants globally, about 3 per cent of the world’s population . . . , and the equivalent of a very large country” (Knott and McLoughlin 6). Although the data provided to illustrate the scale of migration worldwide are from 2008, the numbers have only increased since then. This in itself would be enough to account for the unceasing interest in diaspora studies despite the fact that migrants and diasporans are not exactly the same with regard, for example, to their sedentariness and attitudes to host societies and homelands. “The top three sending countries were China, India and the Philippines, with estimated diasporas of 35 million, 20 million and 7 million respectively,” continue Knott and McLoughlin (6). The significance of the issue suggested by sheer numbers explains at least partly the choice of the South Asian diaspora as the subject of this dissertation.

After their departure from their homelands, during their travels and when settling down, diasporans tend to contact others from their own communities as well as members of other diasporas living in their new environment while maintaining connections with the homeland. Needless to say, forming varying relationships with the mainstream society is yet another concomitant of migration. To describe and to make sense of the actual physical experience involved in this process together with its effects on the imaginary and the cultural production of the people concerned, the term diaspora is frequently employed in spite of the often heated controversy surrounding the use of the term.

There are scholars who believe that diaspora has been overused and loaded with so many, often contradictory or unrelated, meanings that eventually it has lost its valence. Such scepticism may be due to the lack of a precise and consensually accepted definition (Knott and McLoughlin 2), which may, at least partly, originate from the interdisciplinary nature of diaspora studies. It is a field researched by historians, political scientists, social scientists, experts in transnationalism and migration studies as well as literary critics and cultural theorists, to name just the most salient professional and academic communities. Moreover, diaspora is fascinating for some exactly because of its flexibility, porousness and emphasis on connectedness and because it deals with processes which cannot be and should not be defined in fixed and static terms. This multiplicity of foci in diaspora studies makes it difficult “to avoid the slippage between diaspora as a theoretical concept, diasporic ‘discourses’, and distinct historical ‘experiences’ of diaspora. They seem to invite a kind of ‘theorising’ . . . that is always embedded in particular maps and histories,” explains James Clifford (qtd. in Brah 176).

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that most scholars of diaspora establish their own framework and define the context in which they deploy the term to refer to a social practice or to use it as a scholarly concept, an analytical tool, or as a theory. It is the social scientists who are more concerned with categories and typologies such as Robin Cohen, who also provides a clear outline of how diaspora studies have evolved in the four phases of their history (1-2). Cohen does not fail to indicate that first, in its classical meaning, diaspora was confined to the study of the Jewish experience and then, in the 1960s and 1970s, the word began to be applied to the description of the forced dispersion of enslaved Africans. The scattered Armenians and the Irish were the next whose situation was also interpreted in terms of diaspora. The Palestinians were added later without full scholarly consensus. These are, what Cohen calls, victim diasporas, who were forced to leave their homelands by their

respective cruel oppressors and their scattering was interpreted as a traumatic event by those affected. The second phase was the 1980s and the early 1990s when diaspora started to designate different categories of people such as “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*” (Safran 83). This was the time when certain people began to represent themselves as members of diasporas and the emic use of the term emerged; there were also new groups that scholars started to refer to as diasporas, and a distinction between the emic and the etic, i.e., self-applied as opposed to externally attached, uses of the word diaspora appeared.

The years from the mid-1990s constitute the third phase of diaspora studies dominated by social constructionist theorists and cultural critics. Under the influence of postmodernism and deconstruction, they found it timely to “decompose two of the major building blocks previously delimiting and demarcating the diasporic idea, namely ‘homeland’ and ‘ethnic/religious community’” (Cohen 2). They also demonstrated an interest in questions of identity, which they depicted as constructed and deterritorialized rather than essentially given. The current phase of consolidation started at the turn of the millennium, in which some of the social constructionist ideas, especially those aiming to explore the complexity of identity, have been accommodated, while “ideas of home and often the stronger inflection of homeland remain powerful discourses” (Cohen 2).

Cohen then goes on to list his five types of diaspora that can help understand the diasporic phenomenon. Aiming to separate diasporas from strict ethnic identifications, he calls the first type the victim diaspora already described above. His second type is the labour diaspora, in which group he focuses particularly on Indian indentured labourers of the nineteenth century. The next one is the imperial diaspora including British settlers in the colonies, while the fourth type is the trade diaspora with Lebanese and Chinese entrepreneurs of regional or global mobility. It appears that diaspora is too tied to notions of ethnicity as

Cohen cannot successfully describe the phenomenon without using various ethnic communities to provide specific illustrations.

The last category Cohen establishes is that of the deterritorialized diasporas such as the Parsis to be discussed in this dissertation, too. (Cohen 18) The Parsis were driven out of their ancestral home in Persia, now Iran, by the threat posed to them by the approaching Muslim Arabs as early as 652 AD. They have lived in some twelve diasporic communities ever since in such distant locations as Canada and India, with Bombay being their major religious and cultural centre today. Later historical and political events in Iran made it less and less desirable for them to return to their increasingly hostile ancestral home; consequently, the Parsi diaspora has become nearly entirely deterritorialized (Cohen 137) with its members living in several multiply displaced communities, which, however, are still interconnected worldwide.

Focusing primarily on the 1980s and the 1990s, Sudesh Mishra offers a similar division of works on the diaspora using a different terminology and involving certain shifts in emphasis. By entitling his book *Diaspora Criticism*, he indicates a more theoretical and philosophical, mainly Foucauldian, orientation. He also draws attention to the fact that the phases of diaspora criticism “do not constitute neat temporal blocks. Rather, they intersect across the same temporal axis and some participants (such as Vijay Mishra and Stanley Tambiah) end up contributing to more than one” (15).

Mishra identifies three scenes of exemplification. He states that “[i]n the first scene, which may be labelled *the scene of dual territoriality*, the emphasis falls on divided terrains as exemplars seek to account for diasporic subjects, cultures and aesthetic effects in terms of the subjective split between the geo-psychical entities of here and there, of hostland and homeland” (16). William Safran and Robin Cohen quoted earlier belong to this category. He calls the second category the *scene of situational laterality* where the participating exemplars

“take issue with the idea of bounded terrains and the constitutive role played by the tensional split between homeland and hostland in diasporic subject constitution” (16). His examples of this scene are Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, for whom “homogenised, circumscribed and nationalised territories no longer function as privileged referents for identity constitution,” because it is the formation of diasporic identity which serves as the axis of their theoretical approach. It was due to Stuart Hall that later commentators could “think of diasporas in terms of lateral, peripatetic and multipolar (as distinct from linear, fixed and bipolar) positionalities. It follows that the whole question of diasporic identity ends up being linked to situation-specific becoming, or the middle passage (milieu) in the active sense, rather than to the tensional pressures exercised by bipolar nation-states” (S. Mishra 17). This is where hybridity and the hyphenated identity are made possible because “the diasporic subject is simultaneously sundered from and sutured to its various psycho-territories” and rhizomatically experiences “the double movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization” (S. Mishra 17). Ideas of decentralization, fragmentation and indeterminacy dominate this trend in diaspora criticism most closely related to poststructuralism.

Then follows Mishra’s third scene of diaspora criticism, which is *the scene of archival specificity*. Critics involved in it prefer exploring specific diasporas to elaborating on general theories of diasporas. Sudesh Misra’s prime example is Vijay Mishra with his work on the old, nineteenth-century indenture and the new, twentieth-century metropolitan Indian diasporas. Vijay Mishra argues that the former, “exclusivist diasporas that came about during the time of plantation capital exist in a discontinuous and yet overlapping relationship with the new or border diasporas that are a feature of migratory flows in the era of advanced capital” (*The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 18). The present dissertation is similar to this third category established by Sudesh Mishra in that it focuses on literary representations of

one particular diasporic community, that of South Asians, in a given historical period, applying various theoretical approaches deemed relevant to the individual books.

1.2. Theoretical Underpinnings of Diaspora

In the following, a few attempts made by various scholars will be presented to illustrate how critics have designed various theoretical strategies to define and understand the diaspora phenomenon. A statement made by the American political scientist John Armstrong seems to be a common starting point towards the theorization of diaspora. In his paper “Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas” published in 1976 he provides the “prototypical description of diaspora as ‘any [minority] ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity’” (Armstrong qtd. in S. Misra 26). Here he uncouples the concept from the Jewish experience and recognizes its more general applicability. In 1986, Gabriel Sheffer further elaborated on the definition positing that “[m]odern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands” (qtd. in S. Mishra 26). He emphasizes the triadic relationship between host countries, homelands and diasporas as well as the fact that diasporas are always minority groups, a status resulting from a process of migration, for whom the preservation of identity and community solidarity are crucial (Dufoix 21). William Safran also acknowledged the relevance of the term diaspora outside the Jewish experience; however, he is careful not to allow the word to be used indiscriminately, or only metaphorically, and decides to carefully set up six principles to identify who belongs to a diaspora and to characterize diasporic consciousness:

- 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral,” or foreign, regions;
- 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements;
- 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
- 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate;
- 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
- 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83-4)

In Safran’s definition of diaspora, the influence of the Jewish prototype is clearly discernible with his emphasis on the overall importance of the homeland, which he also analyses in more detail in the second part of his study. The defining characteristics of diaspora are all related, in one way or another, to the homeland, which is often designated by the ethnic name of the given diaspora itself. Most significant of these characteristics, because emphasized by most scholars, is the desire to return to this homeland, either physically or imaginatively. However, the binary of the homeland and the host land is strongly contested by the postmodern theorists of diaspora, as will be seen later. These scholars claim that such binaries defy the very essence of diaspora as a liminal space, and they highlight the importance of *routes* as opposed to *roots* in the life of diasporans.

William Safran also uses the six criteria above for comparative purposes and states why and to what extent the respective positions of certain groups of people satisfy such criteria and how close they are to the Jewish prototype. For example, he finds Indians a “genuine” diaspora because of the long history of their dispersal, which spans three continents; the members of the diaspora also play auxiliary (or “middlemen” roles) in the host societies and show varying attitudes—“ranging from integrationist to particularist.” But the Indian diaspora differs from that of the Jews because their homeland has always existed, it has never encouraged an “ingathering,” and the Indian diaspora does not have a minority status in every host society, for example, Fiji. (88)

Safran also analyses the case of the Parsis, who share more characteristics with the Jewish diaspora than the Indians since both the Jews and the Parsis are joined together by their respective common religions, they have been involved in commerce and the “free professions,” they are famous for industrial innovations, and have often provided useful services for the ruling class of the host society. The influential theorist Homi Bhabha, himself a Parsi, also draws parallels between the Jews and the Parsis when claiming that “the Parsis were long known as the ‘Jews of the East,’ not least for their performance of self-critical humor and for their imitation of Western professionalism in business” (qtd. in Sicher and Weinhouse 109). In contrast to the Jews, however, Parsis are not widely scattered but are concentrated mainly in and around Bombay. They do not cherish a myth of the return to their original homeland as they do not wish to resettle in their ancestral home in Iran. Safran explains the Parsis’ weak homeland consciousness with the existence of “the caste system of India and the relatively tolerant attitudes of Hinduism, both of which made for a greater acceptance of social and ethnocultural segmentation and made Parsis feel less exceptional” (89). In the final analysis, “none of [the other diasporas] fully conforms to the ‘ideal type’ of the Jewish Diaspora” for Safran (84).

The work of the scholars listed above illustrates what Cohen describes as the first and second phases of diaspora studies, while Mishra refers to them as exemplars of the scene of dual territoriality. Mishra's observation that the various scenes he identifies in diaspora criticism do not follow each other as linearly arranged, temporal blocks is well demonstrated by the fact that Safran himself re-visits and further elaborates on his ideas presented above in a recent paper entitled "Concepts, Theories, and Challenges of Diaspora: A Panoptic Approach" presented in 2007, while Cohen reprints his own, modified version of Safran's principles in the new, 2008 edition of his *Global Diasporas*, in the form he tweaked and augmented them earlier. He lists the following common features of diaspora:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;

7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (17)

In this list, the homeland is treated in a more nuanced manner with Cohen acknowledging the fact that there are diasporas that exist without being able to claim an actual state for their own, while they wish for one, aim to create one, as do the Sikhs. The emphasis on the homeland is also lessened with the addition of new criteria, as a result of which Cohen distances his type of diaspora from the Jewish ideal, and from the ethno-national one in general. Thus, he regards migrants in search of new pursuits, such as work, as diasporans, even if they have left their homeland voluntarily, unlike the Jews, without suffering from a traumatic event, a catastrophe. The form the return to the homeland can take also reflects a transnational reality in which occasional visits to a homeland may substitute for an eventual return. His last two criteria shift the focus from issues related to the homeland to settlement in the host society and provides a more optimistic view of the future there while also stressing the significance of inter-diaspora bonds.

Examples from the scene of situational laterality, in Mishra's terms, are multitudinous, but what seems to unite critics belonging in this category is that they, especially Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, "enter the debate by subverting the one-to-one relations between race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, sexuality and nation; they do not attempt to repudiate consciousness as a valid object of analysis but they do reject its *bounded peculiarity*, if by that it is implied that diaspora consciousness is an autonomous, unsullied and fixed entity" (S.

Mishra 61). Gilroy and Mercer developed their theories to explain the situation of the black British diaspora, first and foremost, but they also had high hopes for diaspora in general as a celebrated and utopian site where essentialisms and hegemonic moves could be obliterated. They both owe a lot to Stuart Hall, who

[i]n the 1960s and 1970s . . . emerged as the leading exponent of a new academic field: cultural studies. In the 1980s he was one of the most vocal and persuasive public intellectuals in debates on Thatcherism, race and racism. Meanwhile, since the 1990s, Hall's influential writings on identity, diaspora and ethnicity, combined with re-evaluations of his work within the academy have earned him international recognition as . . . “the pre-eminent figure in Cultural Studies today.” (Procter, *Stuart Hall* 3)

In his influential essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” first published in 1990, Hall distinguishes between two different forms of identity, both of which have a role to play in the representation of diaspora. One of them appears to be “an already accomplished fact” (234) based on a shared culture, a shared history producing “stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning,” which uncover the essence, the truth for those who share it. This view of cultural identity was crucial in post-colonial struggles because it enabled colonized people to rediscover an identity that the colonizers tried to eradicate, and this identity, “grounded in the archeology . . . of the past” (235) united them and offered them a sense of coherent experience in spite of their forced dispersal and fragmentation in diaspora under the circumstances of slavery. Hall puts special emphasis on slavery and its aftermaths here as his specific examples derive from the black Caribbean experience.

In the second view of cultural identity, differences, ruptures, and discontinuities are of vital importance. “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like

everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (Hall 236). Hall’s terminology here and further on deliberately evokes Michel Foucault’s views on the inseparable connection between power and knowledge as he argues that colonizers even had the power to impose a form of knowledge on the colonized through “inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the rule” (236). In this way, Hall augments Edward “Said’s ‘Orientalist’ sense”: while Said demonstrates how Western regimes constructed those they had conquered as different, the Other, they also “had the power to make us [Hall, his Caribbean ancestors, and, by extension, other oppressed people] see and experience *ourselves* as ‘Other’” (236). It is situations like this that prove for Hall that cultural identity is not a fixed essence with a fixed origin; it goes through transformations and evolves in new forms all the time. It is also variously “constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. . . . Not an essence but a *positioning*” (236).

This is how similarity and continuity as well as difference and rupture play equally decisive roles in diasporic identity formation. But Hall further clarifies his position:

Its complexity exceeds this binary structure of representation. At different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are resited. They become, not only what they have, at times, certainly been—mutually excluding categories, but also what they sometimes are—differential points along a sliding scale. (239)

To fully exploit the meaning of the sliding scale and to specify Otherness, Hall employs the Derridan concept of *différance*, which combines the meaning of two French verbs: “to differ” and “to defer.” For Hall, difference is important for representation, but what is constituted in representation is always deferred, destabilized. However, he cannot accept the constant

deference of signification since political meaning is vital for him, and it is exactly that which gets lost in endless deference. That is why he introduces “the contingent and arbitrary stop—the necessary and temporary ‘break’ in the infinite semiosis of language” (240). This is where he returns to the importance of *positioning*, by which he means a “‘cut’ of identity . . . which makes meaning possible” in any specific instance (Hall 240). This cut is of strategic importance but contingent and arbitrary, so it is not a permanent closure but one which allows meaning to unfold.

Following this theorizing of identity, Hall applies his tenets to the examination of the black Caribbean diaspora, after which he reaches his definition of diaspora as a concept. He unequivocally distances himself from the literal meaning because, for him, it embodies “the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing, form of ‘ethnicity’” that privileges the return to the homeland at all costs, “even if it means pushing other people into the sea” (244). His diaspora experience is defined metaphorically, “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” (Hall 244).

In another essay of his entitled “New Ethnicities” (1988), Stuart Hall identifies two moments of representation of Britain’s diasporas in the post-war period. In the first moment, the term black is crucial as in “the black experience,” which was used “as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities” and as such “became ‘hegemonic’ over other ethnic/racial identities—though the latter did not, of course, disappear. Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible ‘other’ of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses” (Hall 441). At this point,

black referred to all people of colour in Britain including persons and communities of Middle-Eastern, East-Indian, and other non-British origins. There were two principal objects of this critique: to gain access for black people to means with which they could represent themselves, and to challenge the stereotypical images of blacks by creating positive counter imagery.

The shift that Hall identifies as taking place in the late 1980s introduces the second phase of representation without replacing the first one completely. It signifies a move towards a new meaning of representation away from the mimetic and expressive towards the discursive and constitutive (Hall 443). It involves “the recognition that ‘black’ is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories” (443). Black includes a range of diverse “subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities,” which will be further inflected by issues of class and gender. History, culture and language all play a role in shaping black experience in its diverse forms, which also means that ethnicity itself is not a hegemonic concept either, hence the title of Hall’s essay highlighting the novelty – or constructedness – of the concept treated. Although rooted, ethnicity is not exclusively related to one dominant culture or those on the margin. This new politics of representation also allows for various ways of mixing and hybridization, “the process of cultural *diasporization*” (Hall 447).

Similarly to Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah also foregrounds diaspora as a concept while maintaining the necessity to take into account the historical trajectories of various diasporic communities when interpreting their identities. The circumstances of leaving, arriving, and settling down all have to be accounted for to compare the formation of diasporas. In addition, the social relations of class, gender, race, and sexuality are indispensable variables for her to consider, too. Diasporic experiences are always seen in relation to journeys, which are later remembered, thus reproduced and narrated differently in different historical circumstances,

which explains why diasporic identities thus constructed are never fixed and stable. All these ideas follow what Hall observes in connection with the second moment of representation of ethnic identity in Britain and the changing perceptions of ethnic identity in general.

When historicising diasporic journeys, Brah lists a number of questions that need examining. “The question is not simply about *who travels* but *when, how, and under what circumstances?* What socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions mark the trajectories of these journeys? What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?” (179) Talking about the large variety of people who travel and later narrate their experiences, Chelva Kanaganayakam has the following to say: “Even fundamental definitions of exile, expatriate, refugee, and immigrant have now become increasingly problematic” (202). Nevertheless, he attempts to differentiate among them pointing out how the sensibility informing their narratives is distinct in each case, which, in its turn, determines the thematic preoccupations. While he provides ample detail concerning exiled, expatriate and refugee authors, he fails to specify what he means exactly by immigrant writers. Although exiles, expatriates, refugees, and immigrants are all people on the move and have been identified as belonging in the category diaspora by William Safran earlier, strangely, Kanaganayakam never refers to them as diasporans.

At the beginning of his article “Exiles and Expatriates,” Kanaganayakam observes the different causes of leavetaking, which are mainly political in the case of refugees. Their forced dispersal brings about a sense of loss and disintegration rather than nostalgia about what they have left behind. As their literature tends to be that of resistance with a political agenda, it is usually referential. In contrast, expatriates leave their home voluntarily and experience this mobility as a privilege resulting in “a doubling instead of a split” between cultures (Hussein qtd. in Kanaganayakam 203). As expatriates live on the cusp of exile, “[t]hey remain outsiders, for the conditions that alienated them do not always change, and

their memory creates images that are divorced from the immediate realities, thus creating a more fluid space” (Kanaganayakam 207). In narratives born in this space, referentiality is mixed with speculation. These opportunities of more flexible approaches are often accompanied by troubling questions and doubts, too, such as the one expressed in the following statement: “The dilemma of being bound to the world-view that one is born into but also being able to transcend its constraints is the perspective afforded by the cusp of exile” (Kanaganayakam 210). While the epistemology of home is less problematic for the refugee, it appears to be more complex for the expatriate and requires the constant negotiation of belonging. This predicament is the result of the fact that the expatriate is an outsider away from the homeland, and he or she is alienated from the country of adoption while possessing intimate knowledge of both places.

The distinctions outlined above are hard to maintain in each and every case, which is why Kanaganayakam claims that the works of these authors, whether of refugee or expatriate status, taken together constitute a literature of marginalization and originate from the fringe of the host society; they can be more effectively “distinguished from the literature of the ‘stay at home’ . . . writers” (203) than from each other.

It is at the very end of his essay “Diasporas and Multiculturalism” (1996) that the literary critic Victor J. Ramraj also finds it necessary to explicate the relationship of diasporic writing to immigrant writing, on the one hand, and to exile or expatriate writing, on the other. According to Ramraj, immigrant writing reflects on settlement in a new place and processes of adaptation to the chosen land where, after a period of assimilation of varying degrees, immigrants may be integrated in their adopted country. It is similar to how Kalra et al. view immigration: for them “it implies a one-off event that people migrate from one place and settle in another, end of story” (14). In contrast, exile and expatriate writing is more focussed on the homeland, as seen in Kanaganayakam’s essay, too. Diasporic writing is situated

somewhere between the two incorporating elements of both of these groups of works. As Ramraj sums up: “Diasporic writing then is about or by peoples who are linked by common histories of uprooting and dispersal, common homelands, and common cultural heritages, but it develops different cultural and historical identities depending on the political and cultural particularities of the dominant society.” As he attempts to make such a general statement about diasporic writing, he immediately recognizes the need to make adjustments and adds: “And even within a particular region there are likely to be differences among traditionalists, the assimilationists, and the integrationists” (Ramraj 229).

He makes similar concessions at the beginning of his article, too. At the end of his essay he stresses the trauma of uprootedness and the following insistence on the common cultural heritage as dominant tropes of diasporic writing, which are also its general distinguishing features. However, when identifying the two separate bodies of diasporic writing in international English literature at the beginning of his article, he refers first to the works of those who became slaves or indentured labourers, people who were forcefully removed from their homes in the 18th and 19th centuries as one group, but the second group within the category of diasporic writing is made up “by those from English-speaking regions of the Indian subcontinent, Asia, Africa, and the diasporic communities of the West Indies and Fiji, who for economic, political, cultural, and familial or personal reasons left their homelands for London, England, . . . , and for North America and Australia . . . ” (Ramraj 214). For this second group, migration to new destinations did not appear to be an enforced or traumatic event. Thus, Ramraj distances himself from a strict definition of diaspora and opens the possibility to include all sorts of other communities in the category of diaspora. One might think of such groups as the Hungarian or Ukrainian agricultural labourers who arrived in the Canadian prairies in large numbers in the opening decades of the 20th century (Friesen 244). Ramraj supports, with numerous examples, his claim that “diasporic communities are not

monolithic or homogeneous entities” (216). The differences within diaspora he describes include the circumstances of and reasons for leaving the homeland, the times when diasporic journeys took place, their destinations, the cultivation of a liminal identity by diasporans, their degrees of assimilation in the country of adoption, the strength of attachment to ancestral customs, traditions, religions, languages and values, not to mention generational differences. However, the social relations of gender, class, and sexuality, indispensable for Avtar Brah are absent from Ramraj’s analysis.

As it has been demonstrated above, home and homeland are crucial but perplexing ideas in diasporic writing. That is why Avtar Brah introduces the idea of a homing desire in distinction to the desire for a homeland (177) in order to theorize the complicated position of home and to undermine the binary of homeland and host society in relation to the contested notions of home and belonging, which notions may make exclusion possible. In her view, diasporans may choose to occupy different subject positions vis-à-vis their home depending on what political statements they want to make by asserting where they feel they belong and what their identity is. That is why, for Brah, “the concept of diaspora refers to *multi-locationality* within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries” (194).

Brah also introduces the concept of diaspora space, which “is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (178). The employment of the term critiques fixity and essentialism as diaspora space is

the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested. My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words,

the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’. (205)

Brah’s diaspora space, this in-between place of liminality, is a site where encounters of different kinds, including intercultural ones can take place. This diaspora space appears to share the same conceptual field as Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zones or Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space of enunciation”, although their emphases and contexts are different, to some extent. Bhabha’s Third Space works on the level of discursive construction but how it allows new forms to come into being mainly through hybridization will be shown in more detail and in a particular context in connection with Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*.

Similarly to Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, Brah’s diaspora space and Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zones are locations where various cultures meet. However, Brah’s diaspora space is rather broad as it may include processes, economic, political as well as cultural, together with people on the move. Interestingly, her examination does not only bring migrants but also those “staying put” in the same space. On the other hand, Pratt, when employing the concept of contact zones, focuses on social issues related to culture as they affect people. In her definition, contact zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (7). In her interpretation, contact zones function in a similar manner as contact languages in the relations of people of disparate backgrounds trying to establish possible ways of cooperation. She is very much aware of inequalities, caused by power, involved in this co-existence. Her awareness of such inequalities becomes manifest when she states how she uses the term contact zone “to refer to the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each

other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (8). Since she coined this term, however, it has acquired new meanings and has been used to describe more varied transcultural phenomena, too.

Migrancy and diasporic conditions, however, do not only require the examination of their social and cultural implications but also the study of their impact on the participants’ affective and cognitive make-up: in a word, their psyche. To better understand the psychological entanglements of diasporans who often find themselves alienated from both the homeland and the host society, the concept of the uncanny will also be employed, which can help integrate the interpretive fields outlined above.

The uncanny very often makes its appearance in moments of remembering, consciously or unconsciously, people, events or places from the past in the apparently different, because new, land. That is why the concept of the uncanny is most productive in understanding perceptions of dislocation and the influence of such perceptions on the formation of diasporic identity. The meaning of the uncanny is hard to pin down due to its having been used in so many ways in so many fields ranging from literary studies, psychoanalysis, philosophy and the arts to sociology and robotics. Yet, the uncanny as a theory has only a century-long history dating back to its most basic definition in 1919, proposed by Sigmund Freud in his essay entitled “The Uncanny” (Masschelein 1). Freud states that the “uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (qtd. in Masschelein 159).

For our purposes, it is the association of the uncanny with the contrasting experiences of alienation and familiarity that are especially relevant. Freud obviously did not use the word uncanny but the German *unheimlich*, whose English translation reveals the problems connected with its multiple meanings, which, however, all significantly contribute to the study

of diaspora. Unhomely is the literal English translation of the German word drawing attention to its negation of homely or familiar as one meaning of *heimlich*. It also implies “the awkward but suggestive ‘un-housedness’” (Huddart 81). However, another meaning of *heimlich* can be translated as hidden, furtive, which is thus brought into play by *unheimlich*, too, suggesting an act of semantic uncovering – an ambiguity in the German original whose rich implications cannot be fully explored here. In any case, Masschelein views the problem of the *unheimlich* from the point of view of psychoanalysis to explain why there is no negation or contradiction involved here:

The prefix “un-” is not merely a linguistic negation, it is the “token of repression.” This entails that the uncanny is marked by the unconscious that does not know negation or contradiction; even when something is negated, it still remains present in the unconscious. According to this reasoning, the contradiction resulting from negation is not exclusive or binary: denying something at the same time conjures it up. Hence, it is perfectly possible that something can be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. (8)

In her argument it follows that the uncanny operates as a *mise-en-abyme* and affirms plurality. She also regards uncertainty, ambivalence and doubling as the primary cores of the *unheimlich*.

The dictionary entry defines the meaning of uncanny, which is the standard English translation of *unheimlich*, in everyday use as “unnatural, mysterious, weird” (Hornby 937). Thus, the emotional effect of experiencing the uncanny often involves fear, which, in Freud’s essay, is connected to what is evil, unfamiliar or new, but he adds quickly: “Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening; however, the relation cannot be

inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all” (Freud 2).

Later in her book, Masschelein examines how the uncanny as a concept appeared in fields quite distant from psychoanalysis where Freud originally applied it. One of these fields is postcolonial theory, which relies on the unhomely aspect of *unheimlich*. Masschelein states the following:

Generally speaking, the dissemination of the uncanny in the twentieth century runs along two axes. The “postromantic/aesthetic” tradition emphasizes the semantic kernels of transcendence, the supernatural, and the occult. The “existential/post-Marxist” semantic line of alienation, strangeness, and angst will emphasize the uncanny’s relation to society, politics, and ethics. (131)

It is the existential/post-Marxist direction the theory of the uncanny has taken that postcolonial and diaspora studies are connected to with their shared emphases on strangeness and unfamiliarity. Here alienation is not only seen as a problem, but like any experience it “might inspire us to re-evaluate our identities” thus it is also an opportunity, argues David Huddart in his analysis of the uncanny. He goes on to add that “[t]he uncanny ... opens a space for us to reconsider how we have come to be who we are” (Huddart 83).

The postcolonial as well as the diasporic subjects may feel “un-housed” due to a sense of dislocation or they may feel estranged from themselves when those in power force the marginalized diasporans to view themselves the way the dominant culture constructs them as Others, as has been observed by Stuart Hall above. The uncertainty and ambivalence involved in processes like this, as well as the dissolution of binaries, are explained by means of

deconstruction in Hall's essay, while the same is interpreted through the uncanny by Homi Bhabha.

Since Bhabha uses the idea of the uncanny in many contexts throughout his work (Huddart 80), it is only his essay "The World and the Home" (1992) that will be examined here to demonstrate some of his relevant thoughts. The essay, whose title is the reversal of the title of Rabindranath Tagore's 1916 novel, was later included as part of Bhabha's essay "Locations of Culture" in his volume *The Location of Culture* (1994). It is the word unhomely that appears as a synonym of uncanny in his study focussing on literature, "the House of Fiction," in particular, where "it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" (Bhabha 141). The doubling involved here is that of the domestic space and the public sphere, the border between which turns out to be blurred as the two spaces become part of each other. "The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world" (141) when people's lives are disrupted due to migration. Bhabha's example of this is what happens to Isabel Archer in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). This novel is one of a number by James in which the central issue is the visit of Americans to the old continent and the resulting adjustments they are required to make in their perceptions.

More importantly, however, Bhabha discovers an interstitial relationship between the two spheres in people's lives under the influence of colonization and slavery as illustrated by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or in the aftermath of apartheid as represented in Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990). Logically, he claims, "[a]lthough the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions" (142). To what extent the concept of the uncanny is an

effective tool in the analysis of the novels and stories to be discussed in this dissertation is to be seen in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Creating a Space of Their Own: Diasporic Women in Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman*

Ravinder Rhandawa published her groundbreaking first novel entitled *A Wicked Old Woman* in 1987. The book leaves no doubt about the ethnic background of its protagonist and the spatial setting, which is far from the ancestral home of the central character's ethnicity. On the second page of the book the protagonist is addressed as Mrs Singh, Singh being a very common last name on the Indian subcontinent, and the most common last name used by Sikhs. That she may be of Sikh origin is further confirmed when, in one of her numerous flashbacks, she recalls her mother complaining of her children's terrible Punjabi (Randhawa 11). Punjabi is the language spoken in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, the historic homeland of the Sikhs.

The reason why the children's Punjabi is so weak also becomes apparent early in the novel when it is revealed that the story is not set in the region to which the surname and the language mentioned point. Mrs Singh, called Kulwant or Kuli by her friends and relatives later on in the book, wakes up "on a dark English morning" (Randhawa 5), only to remember her teenage years and "those early days of immigration when she was the only Asian among a sea of whites" (Randhawa 6). Mention is also made of the Indian diasporic community as such at the time and their worries about the English influence, which is seen as possibly rather harmful for Asian women and children (Randhawa 7). These dilemmas and tensions resulting from living in the contact-zone of various cultures permeate the novel throughout.

That the Asian-British intercultural encounter must occur in the post-imperial English metropolis is hinted at by the dropping, here and there, of the name of London and those of some of its landmarks such as Charing Cross Bridge or the river Thames. It is this urban

location where Kulwant's wanderings among her friends and family members, which form the overarching motif in the plot, take place.

The few specific references identifying the time span of the novel also indicate an English setting. Kulwant's first party experience as a teenager can be traced back to a period which "was the pre-time to Beatle-time and not yet chic to be ethnic" in the late 1950s (Randhawa 16), while one important task for the Asian women Kulwant is associated with in her present is to support "the Greenham women" (Randhawa 78), meaning the protests of women against the placement of nuclear missiles at Greenham Common military base. These peace protests started in 1981 and turned into a nineteen-year campaign known as the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, which was finally disbanded in 2000 (Pells). Kulwant must be involved in it at its beginning as she and her friend Caroline "haven't done [their] half centuries yet" (Randhawa 46). This activism is one example highlighting the politicised atmosphere of the novel, typical of England in the 1970s and 1980s.

Such a book, published in Britain in the 1980s, and so unmistakably situated in cultural conflicts delineated from the perspective of the immigrant Other, who happens to be female for that matter, in the postcolonial diaspora in British society was not without antecedents. Instead, it represented the culmination of the various political, social, cultural and literary changes that had started in the post-war period. However, the way Randhawa's novel negotiates cultural differences, explores diasporic identity and foregrounds the female mentalscape in multicultural Britain represents a new departure in the body of Asian British writing (Monteith 33).

Her novel also exemplifies postcolonial writing in England, which gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. British postcolonial writing can be regarded as the outcome of what the novelist and critic Anthony Burgess pointed out as early as 1971: "British colonialism . . . exported the English language, and a new kind of British novel has been the eventual flower of

this transplanting” (165). Although this new kind of British novel may first have been written in the (former) colonies, it also appeared in Western metropolitan centres with the arrival of ever larger numbers of immigrants from the colonial margins. Together with the linguistic, other forms of cultural exchange also took place first in the colonies and then in the metropolitan centres. That is why Elleke Boehmer’s remark on migrant writing is relevant here: “Cultural formations such as the novel, hybridized on the colonial outskirts, are now more intensely hybridized by being returned to the post-imperial Western city which, too, is irrevocably transformed” (234). While the life-stories of Randhawa’s characters unfold, London itself is seen being transformed into a multiracial and multicultural location, becoming the site where fictional hybridization takes place.

Although South Asians have been present in England for four hundred years, initially arriving due to the trading relations developed by the British after the formation of the East India Company in 1600, their mass migration only started in the 1950s (Upstone 1). These facts do not only indicate that their arrival is strongly linked to the history of the British Empire but also reveal that the site of the colonial encounter has never been restricted to the colonies; such encounters have taken place in various forms in Britain itself, too. This relationship between the British and their colonial Others evolving in the mother country, however, was often hidden and “written out of the nation’s political, cultural and literary histories” (Nasta 2).

No wonder that the South Asian contribution to literature in Britain was only sporadic before the 1950s. But even later, to make an impact on the audience and to demonstrate their talent and significance in the field of literature, too, a broader umbrella term was required under which the works of authors from the Third World could be grouped, published and taught together with those by authors from other former colonies. The broad term was Commonwealth literature, which, as an academic discipline, “officially began at British

universities with a 1964 conference at Leeds University” (King 26), where papers addressed questions related to the New Literatures in English, another phrase that was used to refer to Commonwealth literature at the time. The Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies was also formed at Leeds University the following year to provide a more stable institutional framework. That year also saw the launch of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, which is still a leading forum in the field of postcolonial writing.

The Booker Prize, established in the same decade in 1969, also played a role in making Commonwealth literature fashionable (King 27), with its policy of “rewarding the best novel of the year written in English” (“History”), thus allowing the jury to select their choice from a very broadly defined group of works, whose shared feature was the language. Due to this fact, books from all the New Literatures in English written either in the former colonies or in the diaspora could enter the contest. One restricting criterion to be met throughout the years, however, has been that the book be published in the United Kingdom.

To provide further publishing opportunities and to facilitate critical dialogue about Commonwealth literature in Britain, two important international journals were founded at the time by which that literature had become a proliferating phenomenon turning into an undeniable branch of British literature, part of which was written by immigrant writers in Britain itself. *Kunapipi* was launched in 1979, while *Wasafiri* was established in 1984, both specializing in creative writing from the postcolonial margins and related literary criticism. The latter journal “was published under the auspices of the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African, Asian and Associated Literatures (ATCAL), a national organization in Britain which acted as a pressure group in the late 1970s and early 1980s to persuade examination boards to include and to take seriously the writings of authors such as Sam Selvon, Jean Rhys, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Anita Desai among others” (Raja and Bahri 1162). Interestingly, the word *wasafiri*, which comes from the Kiswahili language, means travellers

(“Background”), anticipating some further shifts in the approach to the New Literatures in English, which later involved increased efforts to go beyond all sorts of geographical, linguistic and theoretical confines.

An illustration of such a shift is what happened to the term Commonwealth literature in years to come: it was found to be too restrictive because it limited its scope to areas of former British imperial dominance and to the English language, thus preventing more global and comparative perspectives. At the same time, it failed to make “any explicit reference to the political realities of the colonial and imperial past” (Poplawski 668). This oppositional attitude towards the term was growing stronger and stronger at a time when new theoretical approaches were burgeoning in literary and cultural studies, especially post-structuralism. That is how, by the late 1980s, the term postcolonial literature replaced Commonwealth literature and became the dominant designation offering more opportunities for theorization and moving the emphasis from geography to ideology.

Yet, more recently, critical voices recommending a revision of the postcolonial frameworks are being heard louder as those uttering such criticism are becoming increasingly doubtful about postcoloniality being still the contemporary condition (Upstone 8), and about the validity of interpreting literary works in the contexts of vestigial imperialism and colonization. True, postcolonial criticism can still successfully be employed to current issues of neo-colonialism, as such criticism mainly examines the relationships between the cultures of countries and the power they wield over each other in terms of the centre-periphery dichotomy. Nevertheless, to understand the literary configurations of contemporary Britain, an examination of the cultural production of its communities within her borders may result in more insight when ideas of multiculturalism are foregrounded, which place “a greater emphasis on questions of identity, sexuality, [and] interracial romance” (Ranasinha 5). The latter approach focuses on “writing in” and being accommodated rather than “writing back”

and subversion. However, the two approaches cannot be strictly separated; therefore, the use of a related theoretical model with a long history also gaining currency since the latter part of the twentieth century, that of the diaspora, may be appropriate here for the discussion of Randhawa's novel. Susheila Nasta, the founding editor of *Wasafiri*, emphasizes the opportunities offered by diasporic space, which "enables the growth of 'new identities and subjectivities' as well as alliances which exist 'outside what has been called the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference'" (Needham qtd. in Nasta 7).

When criticizing the oppositional accounts of the contemporary situation made by postcolonial thinkers, Bruce King also stresses the desire of the migrants to make a home in their host societies. "Rather than the peasants revolting against globalism," argues King, "people came to England in search of publication, education, better jobs, more secure lives, or adventure. They are part of the globalization of the economy, communications, transportation, and culture, not rebels against it" (5). This seems to be an apt description of what Arjun Appadurai calls a diaspora of hope (6), describing a situation where people migrate not because of facing terror or unbearable circumstances in their ancestral home, which motivated the original Jewish or Armenian diasporas and left them with a sense of trauma. Appadurai's diaspora of hope is brought about by people taking advantage of the possibility of free global movement.

It is this diasporic space that Kulwant as a South Asian woman in Britain tries to create for herself in various ways in Randhawa's novel. Returning to the opening lines already referred to at the beginning of this paper where her identity seems to be firmly established by her name, the reader discovers how significantly this section is titled: "Kuli's Cover-up". It is a white nurse in a hospital who calls her Mrs Singh suggesting her institutional confinement to one identity in one particular racial category while Kulwant is already planning her character change by shifting her ethnic marginalization to that of class and age. She takes on

the role of “an old bag or a smelly hag” (Randhawa 4), which liberates her from all her social and familial responsibilities as a middle-aged mother and allows her the freedom to roam the streets of the city, to become an urban nomad. This is how she metamorphoses into the wicked old woman in the title of the novel, as her friend Caroline facetiously calls her on occasion. It is not only the title of the book that thus directs the reader’s attention to the question of identity, whether it is essential and solid or constructed and flexible, but also the opening line of this and several other chapters functioning as a refrain in the story: “Stick-leg-shuffle-leg-shuffle. Stick-leg-shuffle-leg-shuffle” (Randhawa 2). The stick is Kulwant’s, an indispensable part of her created identity, while the word shuffle is suggestive of the way she walks in this role; therefore, the refrain constantly reminds the reader of her playing a role, her moving between identities.

The fluidity of Kulwant’s assumed identity is a source of fun or a source of distress depending on the circumstances. When she manages to trick people into believing that she is an impoverished elderly woman, she usually benefits from the deception as she receives assistance to cross the road or gets invited to a subsidized trip for the elderly. “Pretend and thou might receive according to thy pretences” is her ironic comment using mock-Biblical language (Randhawa 33). In doing so she exposes white hypocrisy, like G. B. Shaw’s Alfred Doolittle, one of “the undeserving poor” in *Pygmalion*, twice over: on the level of the plot and on that of discourse, too. But when she is mistaken for a white lunatic by other South Asian women, she is definitely disappointed, “though she’d gotten what she wanted because they hadn’t seen through her. But it didn’t feel nice for them to think she was one of the others” because it alienates her from white society as well as her subcontinental diasporic community (Randhawa 51).

This feeling is provoked in her after she fools around in front of the tinted windows of a stainless steel office building: “she must stare at the distorted shadow reflected on the shiny

polished metal. Smudged outline seeping out in different directions as she waggled, head, foot or hand . . . made funny faces” (Randhawa 51). Her image is reflected and refracted by the shiny surface allowing her to transgress all boundaries.

Kulwant’s childhood memory in the untitled section on the opening page of the novel also raises the issue of transformation, its reality and permanence. When the young girl tries to paint a red bindi, a small coloured dot usually worn by Hindu women between their eyebrows, on her Russian doll using nail polish in an act of acculturation, the red blob creates a streak on it. When she clumsily adds one more dot, red tears are shaped and stay on the face of the doll forever. In their artificiality, however, they are more permanent than the real tears the girl sheds so the constructed nature of the cultural artefact is more intransient and noticeable, and therefore real, than lived experience. As Sarah Upstone comments, “[a]s a female Asian child raised in Britain in the 1950s she is already acutely aware of her unreality, of being unrecognised, so that the doll has more presence than she does” (65). The cultural mixing brought into being is also far from celebratory, as it is associated with the act of crying.

The painting of a bindi on a Russian doll challenges authenticity, too, which is depicted as impossible in this case: the doll is neither essentially Russian nor Indian any more. Authenticity is impossible as well as ironic when Kulwant takes pains to construct her authentic image of an old hag, which is nothing but oxymoronic: “A pair of NHS specs was what she needed. The final authentic touch” (Randhawa 13). The same impossibility is experienced in the Asian Centre, whose door Kulwant pushes open only to find herself in “simulation Sub-Continent. Misbegotten child of a guilty conscience. Frankenstein patched together with the flotsam of travel posters, batik work, examples of traditional embroidery, cow bells and last but not least woven baskets that you knew were from Oxfam” (Randhawa 30). The accumulation of such an assortment of mismatched objects is reminiscent of Victor

Frankenstein's creation of the monster that is doomed to die together with his maker. The Asian Centre appears to be a disheartening liminal space where the visitors together with the community workers who cater for them are also in a liminal position:

Here in the Asian Centre, there should be no doubt of who or what you are and of your value. Yet no one, not by any stretch of fantasy, could make any such categorical claim. This was no haven of calm in the middle of a storm, buffeted as it was by the pull of many an opposing demand, staffed by workers who in themselves are uncertain crucibles in search of a self. (Randhawa 31)

Kulwant's fragmented account of her past in the first part of the novel presents her own struggle to avoid a similar liminality, life in between cultures, and her desire for identification. That is why she first embraces complete Englishness in an attempt to assimilate. When that fails, she returns to her Indian heritage reclaiming her traditional self. Soon after her immigration to England with her family to reunite with her father working there, she starts another voyage between cultures and communities, this time within the same country. For her, "[f]reedom became an English patent and to be free was to imitate Englishness . . . she was so continually different to yearn to be the same and being the same meant having a boyfriend" (Randhawa 6). This boyfriend of hers is the quintessential white male with blue eyes and blond hair, who employs the typical colonial stereotype to exoticize her as "his 'Indian Princess', 'the mysterious oriental woman'" (Randhawa 6). Her English social life with her boyfriend called Michael and her Asian family life diverge so significantly that Kulwant eventually develops a double life: one for the outside world, and one for home, but the two cannot be reconciled (Parekh qtd. in Ghosh-Schellhorn 244).

The relations of the colonizer and the colonized are replayed in their attachment to each other in “the new Empire within Britain”, to borrow Salman Rushdie’s phrase (129). As it did not work in the subcontinent, it does not work in England, either. It is revelatory here to remember the nickname that Kulwant and her friend gave Michael calling him the Archangel between themselves: “This rather ironic label puts Michael into the customary stereotype of the colonial, Christian, English gentleman in all his arrogance, who is convinced of his own missionary munificence towards the ‘heathen’ colonial subjects, the Indians, who were made to believe in their own inferiority” (Vogt-William 393). The attitude thus emblemized by Michael is reminiscent of a Biblically named character St John Rivers in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, who is similarly conceited when proposing to Jane and offering to take her with him as his companion on his missionary journey to India. St John Rivers and Michael the Archangel share a twofold sense of superiority based on racial prejudice, on the one hand, and patriarchal authority, on the other. However, the two related but distinct types of bias manifest themselves in two separate instances of interpersonal relationship in the case of St John Rivers: he feels racially superior to the subcontinental “heathens” and appears patriarchal in his attitude to Jane Eyre. In Michael’s case, however, the two biases coincide as they both target Kuli, and he does not even have to leave England to realize both.

Before Kulwant’s affair with Michael culminates in a disaster at a party hosted by Caroline, the tragic outcome is foreshadowed by a conversation between Kulwant and an English boy at the party. His father was born in India as the family had worked there for several generations and they keep visiting the country even after having relocated to England. The boy’s arrogance and superficiality upset Kulwant when he makes the casual remark revealing his ignorance about the differences between expatriate communities: “‘I’m determined not to miss my trip [to India] this year. I suppose you must go as often as you can also.’ How she hated him. She was consumed with envy, jealousy and malice. Her parents

could hardly afford to go themselves, let alone take the children” (Randhawa 19). Kulwant already has forebodings on her way to her friend’s earlier: “Walking to Caroline’s house: walking from one world to another . . . England allured and England procured and like tadpoles to a shark we swam right into its pink mouth: and not only us, we’re only part of the endless stream from grain to tea to art to ideas” (Randhawa 15).

That is exactly how she feels later when Michael proposes she marry him. When, instead of saying yes, Kulwant explains how she wants to explore other options in life such as studying, working and seeing the world, before committing herself to a husband, Michael equates her in his anger with her community and their authoritarian traditions such as the arranged marriage. He demands that “[i]f they’re [Kulwant’s people] going to stay here, they’ll have to change” (Randhawa 24). The ensuing quarrel continuing with Kulwant’s reply replicates the dialogue between the colonial master and his charge:

“You lot didn’t [change] when you came to our country”.

“That was different. We ruled it”.

“Just as you want to rule me”.

“Very funny. Ha ha ha . . .” (Randhawa 24)

But Kulwant is not willing to accept the position of a victim who needs to be rescued when she rejects the imposition of the Arthurian legend on their relationship saying, “Rescue me! How dare you. You’re the dream come true, aren’t you. Galahad on his white horse!” (Randhawa 26) She gains agency as she asserts herself, rejects Michael’s proposal together with his stereotypical positioning of her and makes decisions for herself.

Needless to say, the love affair breaks up in this incident but not before the roles change and Kulwant, the marginalized ethnic Other, is revealed by Michael to be involved in

“colonizing in reverse” (Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction* . . . 177). She is depicted to have been the observer, like a nineteenth century Western anthropologist, watching Michael as if he were an object in a colonial gaze. He explains: ““You thought you’d find out about the weird customs of the English . . . we are not animals in a zoo. And I thought you were the shy and innocent one. You were just holding back . . . watching me. You never took us seriously”” (Randhawa 25). He goes on to describe further reversals of roles involved in their relationship: ““And I thought it was your parents who were traditional, old-fashioned and us English who were prejudiced. Boy, have I learnt a lot from you . . . the funny thing is . . . you thought it would be the other way round”” (Randhawa 26). Colonial mentality on either side can only result in distrust and denunciation.

After this failed love affair, Kulwant comes to the conclusion that assimilation and acculturation are undesirable and she does not want to live in a hybrid space any more:

No more trying to walk in the middle. There were too many pot-holes and she was like a blind woman without a stick. Safer to stay in territory that she knew. . . . She’d messed it all up because she had wanted everything, wanted to be Indian and English, wanted to choose for herself what she wanted out of both. Couldn’t be done. (Randhawa 29)

She decides to return to her roots and another stereotype, that of an Indian bride in a marriage she asks her parents to arrange for her. Due to her “being schizoided [sic] by her English growing-up” (Randhawa 53), however, she again becomes an outside observer during the wedding preparations, no matter that this was her own choice. Cultural transformation, as suggested here, is an unavoidable consequence of immigration for those raised in Britain as it transpires from an imaginary conversation between Kulwant and her mother, revealing a

generational difference, too. The mother, who arrived in England as an adult, has “never lost [her] anchor of certainty” but England, their host country, “has put [Kulwant] into one of its mixers” (Randhawa 54). Its influences will always be felt, yet the trajectory of the diasporan’s life is far from being predetermined or fixed as exemplified by Kulwant remaining unsettled.

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that Kulwant’s choice of the Indian arranged marriage turns out to be a failure in the long run, too. “Inevitably, her attempt to conform to that stereotype [of a member of the Indian community] is doomed to failure, for it is based on fear, resentment and self-denial” (Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction* . . . 189). Having no passion in her life, she does not care about her husband, who eventually leaves her and they get divorced. Her children become estranged from their unorthodox mother, who

had insisted on bringing arguments and controversies into family life. . . . All their lives she had used words to try and break the mould of English/Asian boyhood. . . . If she had tried to make them totally Indian or push them into being westernised they would have understood; they would have had something concrete to rebel against. They never had rebelled, no matter how much she provoked them. (Randhawa 101)

Kulwant follows a different strategy of identification when bringing up her sons in contrast to how she tried to shape her own life, self-consciously situating them in the hybridized reality of diasporic space and trying, in vain, “to inculcate unconventionality as a virtue” in them (Ghosh-Schellhorn 244). Her eldest son Anup becomes a successful intellectual, a university lecturer and researcher, with an Indian wife, a psychologist, who both enjoy the material benefits of their middle-class position having successfully integrated into English society. They manage to satisfy norms shared by the two cultures such as the importance of education. At the same time, they have not given up on their ethnic community,

either, as Anup is writing *The Invisible Indian*, “a book charting the Indian contribution to England’s economy and society” (Randhawa 99), while his wife Pavan treats Indian patients making use of her knowledge of both cultures and languages. Kulwant’s second son Malkit represents the growing transnationalism of the time as he is on his way to the United States to join a team working on a project; he and his wife are “middle-brow, mid-ranking, middle-of-the-roaders” (Randhawa 147).

The sons exemplify the various strata of British Asian society with the youngest, Arvind, working as a car mechanic and living in a mixed marriage having married Shirley, a white working-class woman. This is a well-functioning hybrid family in spite of the initial negative, at times racist, reactions they received from both whites and Asians. Shirley takes pride in her husband’s ethnic background and insists on calling him by his Indian name in ironic contrast to his mother calling him Arnold. She has learnt to prepare tea Indian-style and makes sure their sons learn Hindi. She explains, “I decided. It’ll be good for business. Knowing the lingo . . . besides I won’t have them being ashamed of anything. Not their Dad, not me. They’ve got to be proud of what they are” (Randhawa 94). She is talking about both ethnic and class differences in British society, which can be overcome in this family over the generations. The sons’ lives illustrate that cultural negotiations can be at least partially successful.

However, Randhawa is very careful to avoid painting an idealized picture or homogenizing the British Asian community. She also presents characters, such as Rishi, who belong to her children’s generation yet suffer from the consequences of mixed marriages. Rishi describes “how he was never one with anyone, neither the whites nor the Asians. He had to decide for himself who he was” (Randhawa 168). To define himself, he adopts an Asian identity but, unlike Kulwant’s similar endeavour to construct an Indian identity, he succeeds.

In the characters' self-identification their connection to English culture and the culture of their origin plays a decisive role. However, there is a "gap between the first-generation immigrants from the former colonies in the subcontinent and their offspring who have little first-hand knowledge of South Asia" (Ranasinha 224). Kuli also points out this difference in Randhawa's novel saying that India is "a country that for some was home, for others nothing more than a distant childhood memory, and for those born here [in England] a patchwork land transmitted through parents' stories of places, people, happenings" (31). Although Kuli was born on the South-Asian subcontinent, she seems to lack personal recollections of India because she arrived in England together with her mother and siblings as a young child to reunite with her father after he had collected enough money by working there to support his family. The lengthiest familial memory is provided by her mother in her description of the family's painful experience of departing, in despair, from Western Punjab. Their ultimate leave-taking occurred during the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 amidst killings and other atrocities perpetrated during the ethnic conflict between Hindus and Muslims living in the region.

Due to Kulwant's emotional detachment from her ancestral home, a permanent return to India is never an option for her. When a trip there for her is mentioned by Arvind, her youngest son, himself a second generation immigrant, to help his mother recover from mental strain, he provides a stereotypical view of the land: "All that vitamin D in the sunshine, friendship of other women, the luxury of being in one's own country" (Randhawa 96). Kuli relegates the idea of return and interpersonal reunification to the realm of fantasy right away knowing that most of her childhood friends "would have been married off years and years ago" (Randhawa 96). She experiences moments of nostalgia, though:

Her heart ached for going back. India was no utopia of peace and order, freedom and equality, but at the very least their right to live and work wouldn't be questioned, they wouldn't have to guard against racism at every level every day. They might get you for all sorts of other things but not for being a different colour. (Randhawa 142)

If India holds no attraction for her for private reasons, it nevertheless offers relief on a societal level. She eventually does return for a short period of time, which she is later reminded of by the aromas of the spice rack in an Asian grocery shop in London. Thus, the culture of India is present not only in memories, but also in the smells and images of food, which metonymically signifies culture (Döring 255). The episode is reminiscent of the sensually triggered act of spontaneous recollection as famously recorded by such modern European writers as Marcel Proust and his later followers.

The confluence of imaginary sensations from the subcontinent and real smells in the western metropolis brings us to Kulwant's statement on where she intends to spend the rest of her life as a diasporan brought up in England:

“We're never going to go back. We should throw away our pipe dreams of returning home. How many of the children are going to go back? And if the children aren't going to go back how many of the parents will? We're caught whether we like it or not. Whether they like it or not. And because we're here to stay we have to leave a legacy for the future, for the children to whom India will be just another country. Immigration part of their history. They'll be British by birth but never by colour.”
(Randhawa 144)

It is the newer generations of South Asians, for whose problems the return to their ancestral home will not provide a solution, on whose behalf Randhawa's protagonist speaks here and whose chances of social and cultural integration into British society Randhawa foregrounds in the novel.

Another Asian life from the second generation of immigrants that runs parallel to Kulwant's is that of Rani, who also attempts to free herself by running away from home, join the white society by assuming a new identity and cutting herself loose from her Indian background, but in her case it has more tragic consequences. By changing her name into Rosalind and pretending to have South American ancestry, she turns out to be an ultimate non-conformist living in hostels, empty houses and squats and becoming the victim of racism, exploitation in poor working conditions, and rape, which she can only avoid by becoming a murderer. Due to the physical conditions and the mental strain, she ends up being an outsider socially and mentally, too, resulting in her complete breakdown and hospitalization.

"Kulwant sheds her isolation and her chosen identity as a helpless cripple when she joins Maya, West Indian Angie and others in a marathon of storytelling which gradually pulls Rani back from semi-consciousness and the abyss of madness" (Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction* . . . 190). As Tobias Döring argues, Kulwant "claims the benefit of unbelonging" in her guise as a poor elderly woman (259), but after hearing Rani's and others' stories of misery and hurt she experiences a moment of epiphany realizing her own selfishness: "learning lessons from the past is all very well. Not much good if you cop out of putting them into practice. Had gone into hiding from the future in play-acting; had tried to cheat the future by pretending she was old and past it" (Randhawa 191). At this point she discards her tattered clothes together with her stick, markers of her assumed identity, she departs from all the stereotypes she previously adopted mistakenly hoping for liberation, and turns her attention to her community of British Asian women and the present to participate in Rani's healing

process. Being rooted, belonging to a community and being grounded in Britain at the same time are all necessary for her to gain a sense of herself.

Significantly, the healing process is a communal activity in which sharing stories as well as food binds people together, restores their strength, establishes their communal identity, and makes them realize the need to take social responsibility. This part of the novel where stories follow one another in a disjointed manner mirrors, to some extent, the novel as a whole with its kaleidoscopic presentation of women's lives, a technique probably influenced by the way members of the Asian Women Writers' Collective founded by Randhawa used to get together weekly in the 1980s to read "their writing to each other and gain the support of the group. The reading of manuscripts aloud influenced the content, style, and length of works: the preferred manner was short and punchy" (King 131).

After Rani/Rosalind regains consciousness, she makes her decision to confess her crime while the others around her, who are not exclusively Asian or female, take agency together, start organizing a campaign for her and the novel ends with an affirmation of the need for an active life, the imperative to embrace "ACTION" (Randhawa 207). There is a sense of integration here of people of the most varied backgrounds, which expresses Randhawa's optimistic view that the South Asian diaspora in Britain is there to stay and their differences can be accommodated.

The same message is effectively conveyed by discursive means, too. According to Döring, due mainly to "the critical presentation of a broad realistic spectrum," *A Wicked Old Woman* "has strong generic affinities with the picaresque novel" held loosely together by the socially mobile protagonist Kulwant wandering through it (259). However, sometimes she completely disappears and allows the author to provide glimpses into the inner world of her other characters using them as focalizers just as Virginia Woolf did in *The Waves* before her. The dilapidated buildings housing various shelters such as the ones for the Asian elderly or

the Asian runaway girls as well as the Asian family home destroyed in a racist arson attack or the walls distancing characters from each other appear as “objective correlatives” in the text (Monteith 33), a technique famously defined and employed by the modernist poet T.S. Eliot earlier. Eliot explicates their significance in the following: “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion” (125). As it has also been seen, epiphany, this Joycean device plays a key role in Kulwant’s change of mind. But at the same time Randhawa’s book is teeming with characters like a Rushdie-novel and it is not without digressions, either, reminiscent of the great contemporary’s work in that respect, too. The use of digressions, however, goes back to the earlier oral tradition of Indian story-telling (Gorra 129), which is also evoked by the title of one of the chapters called “Scheherazades over a Sleeper” bringing to mind the tales of *The Arabian Nights*, too. Creating the hybrid space of the diaspora metaphorically as well as literally and inhabiting it may be an often painful process, yet this is a flexible space where different ethnic identifications are possible. That it is worth occupying this space is confirmed by Randhawa’s novel.

Chapter 3: Identity Formation of the Diasporic Subject in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*

Among the common elements of diasporic writing, although emphasized to varying degrees, are the discussions of the relationship to the homeland. Central to the original meaning of diaspora, that relationship entails the expression of a longing to belong, a homing desire, to use Avtar Brah's concept, and the attendant attempts to counteract the effects of dislocation, alienation and marginalization due to ethno-cultural differences in the new country of residence.

The connection to the homeland and the hostland is represented in many different ways in diasporic writing, which also examines the resulting duality of the diasporan's life. This duality, in its turn, can also involve a double gain for some or a complete loss for others. What characterizes the diasporic community located in the interstitial space of the two lands? This question becomes especially important because home as a contested term does not only mean a geographical area but is also the site of one's culture, which in turn shapes one's identity. Can there be metonymic connections between home, culture and identity for a diasporan? Such concerns are expressed by Salman Rushdie when he analyses the ambiguous situation of the migrant writer in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" (1982). One other issue to be investigated in this chapter devoted to a pivotal novel of Rushdie's can in essence be captured by two words employed above: does Rushdie write from the position of a diasporic or a migrant writer? What are the differences between the two sensibilities and what are the consequences of occupying one or the other position? How does such a choice manifest itself in his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988)?

In "Imaginary Homelands", Rushdie states the following about Indian writers in England: "Our identity is plural and partial. Sometimes we straddle two cultures; at other

times we fall between two stools” (15). While new options are offered and access is granted to the previously hidden knowledge of another culture as a result of migration, which is where plurality arises from, losses are unavoidably involved in the process. The migrant cannot remain an integral part of the ancestral culture to the extent as he did before migrating but does not fully belong to the new cultural environment either. As a result the migrant’s existence becomes fragmented or torn between the two geo-cultural environments. Bryan Cheyette reflects on the problematics of living in or between two worlds in the following way: “The experience of diaspora can be a blessing or a curse”, which is basically in accordance with Rushdie’s statement above, but then Cheyette goes on to add: “or more commonly, an uneasy amalgam of the two states” (qtd. in Nasta 132) emerges, which further complicates the matter.

Talking about migrant and immigrant perspectives in his novels, Rushdie actually prefers the use of the former term, highlighting his preoccupation with transformations brought about by travelling and with a resistance to fixed positions (Nasta149). When the migrant’s life is disrupted by movement, the same movement creates new opportunities for intercultural encounters that in their turn may lead to alterations in the migrant’s life and, most importantly, to re-inventions of the migrant’s self. It is an important corollary of the above that the disjunctions and the discontinuities the migrant experiences are only partly the consequence of his movement in space: such disruptions have just as much to do with the migrant’s movement in time. The ancestral home the migrant writer has left behind becomes the past, while his new living environment is the present. When he re-visits this home imaginatively in his writing, it is also a return in time, and memory provides the means to do so as witnessed by the relevant work of such novelists of a European background as a Vladimir Nabokov or a Sándor Márai. No less does Salman Rushdie foreground memory in his novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981), indicating that remembering is not only a method but

also a subject for him. Memories also allow him to challenge totalizing discourses and to offer frequently contradictory versions of the past.

Contending narratives of the past are thematically related to conflicts arising from cultural encounters entailed in the process of migration itself. In this connection, mention must be made of the influential post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, who formulated his conceptions of culture and identity at about the same time as Rushdie fictionalized similar ideas in his narratives. Even the less attentive reader notices direct echoes of Rushdie's writing in Bhabha's work such as the essay entitled "How Newness Enters the World", published in 1994, only a few years after the appearance of *The Satanic Verses*. The title itself repeats Rushdie's question in the novel almost word for word, as will be seen below, but more importantly, it also reiterates one of the novelist's central topics, the complex issue of hybridity. It is not negligible, either, that a whole section of Bhabha's abovementioned essay, the one subtitled "Foreign Relations," is dedicated to *The Satanic Verses*. For reasons like this, some crucial notions expressed by the theorist and narrativized by the novelist will be discussed below before the detailed analysis of some of the most immediately relevant parts, for this dissertation, of Rushdie's book.

In some instances, however, Homi Bhabha goes even further than Rushdie. Such is the case when, in his dense style characterised by a large degree of opacity deriving from its heavy reliance on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic and Michel Foucault's discourse-oriented post-structuralist theories, he discusses the identity of culture. He claims that no culture, even in itself, is unitary and homogeneous ("Cultural Diversity . . ." 207). He explains:

The reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation—the place of utterance—is crossed by the difference of writing or *écriture*. . . . It is this 'difference' in language that is crucial to the

production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent . . . (“Cultural Diversity . . .” 207)

The enunciation or utterance refers to the verbal act performed at a particular historical moment. However, the written, as opposed to the spoken, statement loses its location-bound specificity and becomes more open to interpretation. The interplay between “enunciation” and “écriture” – the *énoncé*, as it is sometimes called – creates a fluid state for culture to exist in. It should not be forgotten, either, that in the act of enunciation two participants are involved, from which it follows that

[t]he pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Place, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot “in itself” be conscious. (Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity . . .” 208)

Thus, cultural statements are made and meanings are produced in this ambivalent Third Space of enunciation, where differences can be articulated. It is a liminal space, and Bhabha claims that such spaces open up “the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (“Introduction: The Locations of Culture” 4). In another essay of his entitled “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative” (1994), he further elaborates on the role of the space of enunciation stating that

the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. (38)

In their interpretation of Bhabha's Third Space, the critics Kuortti and Nyman explore its potentials regarding identity formation:

to enter the Third Space, while it shows the potentiality of constructing a non-fixed identity, generates a new sense of identity that may resemble the old ones but is not quite the same. Bhabha describes this Third Space of enunciation by using the Freudian term of the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, or the 'unhomely,' and suggests that what is involved in the construction of hybrid identity is an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations." (8)

It appears that the Third Space as an in-between position also corresponds to the mindset of a diasporan living on the borderland between the cultures of his ancestral and adopted home. The ancestral home becomes the past, the stable, unchanging fixity, while the new country requires transformations and openness, as it has been argued by Stuart Hall. But even the past can be unreliable and open to various interpretations as it is often narrated through the lens of memory, as it will be seen in some of the pieces to be discussed. What Bhabha emphasizes concerning his concept of the Third Space is that it gives room to cultural

exchange, allows the interdependence of cultures past and present, of here and there, to come to the fore and makes the idea of cultural purity unsound; in other words, Bhabha's article leads to the conclusion that culture cannot be but hybrid.

In my view, if culture plays a decisive role in shaping personal identity, and this culture is hybrid, then identity cannot but become hybrid, too, especially in the diasporic space. While Bhabha and Rushdie both celebrate hybridity and Rushdie seems to agree with Bhabha that "hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity . . ." 208) and essentialist approaches to culture are not valid, a strong critique of hybridity has also been expressed by other scholars.

The term hybridity has been used in several discourses with different connotations, variously employed in a positive or a negative sense. The derivation of the term can be traced back to horticulture where it was (and still is) used in reference to the artificial cross-breeding of different species effected by the horticulturist to create improved living organisms. The resulting hybrid, the new plant, was expected to possess qualities deemed superior to those of the cross-bred species possessed individually. The term is still employed in much the same sense in other fields, too, for example, in car manufacturing where hybrids are produced to resolve the crisis caused by the decrease in non-renewable energy sources, therefore, are regarded as more efficient means of transport due to the combination of two sources of propulsion.

In linguistics, the idea of hybridity goes back to the cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who also celebrates its disruptive power and subversive energy (358-68). According to Werbner, "Bakhtin distinguishes between two forms of hybridization: organic (unconscious) and aesthetic (intentional) hybridity" (qtd. in Kuortti and Nyman 6). Examples of the former in music include salsa, tango, and jazz, while contemporary world music features in the latter category. Although world music is also aesthetically pleasing, it does not possess the political

and cultural weight “that Gilroy, Bakhtin and Ishmael Reed assign to the ‘unintentional’ histories of that process” (Kuortti and Nyman 6). The reason for the diminished prestige accorded to world music may be due to the perceived commercialism of the genre seen to be co-opted by the commodity culture of “late capitalism.”

It was in the 1980s that cultural critics and literary theorists recognized the transformative potential of living in the “hybrid.” This word came to replace such negative signifiers as miscegenation or contamination because it was seen as a critical tool to not only “a new space for agency at the interstices of the nation’s borders, but a space where formerly antagonistic and polarized versions of identity could be realigned and renegotiated” (Nasta 178). According to Kuortti and Nyman, cultural theories have further extended the meaning of the term hybridity and apply the concept now to the examination of hyphenated identities of people and ethnic communities as well as to literary works about them. (4)

However, Kuortti and Nyman also point out that “[a]s the traditional usage of the concept of hybridity is embedded in the narratives of evolution, the hybrid was originally conceived of as infertile and often as an inferior copy of the original” (4). An obvious example from biology one might think of is the sterile mule, the offspring of a horse and a donkey. This is a sign of warning that hybridity has its downsides as well – at least in the context of scientism-flavoured approaches inspired by biological metaphors.

As for instances of mixing that involve humans, it was in the imperial cultures of the nineteenth century—such as those of the British, the French, or the Russian empires—that the mixing of human races, sometimes considered to represent different species, came to be regarded as despicable and even dangerous for the colonizers threatening them with contamination, with a degradation of their race and culture. It was especially so because the ideology of colonization was partly based on the idea of white supremacy, which was connected to the alleged purity of the white colonizers. It is the connection of hybridity to this

human aspect of the history of biological and cultural mixing that makes Robert Young advise other critics to distance themselves from the concept of hybridity and its indiscriminate uses (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 121). Opposition to the notion of cultural hybridity is also expressed on the grounds that it emphasises the mutuality and interdependence of cultures while ignoring their hierarchical relationship. Specifically, it is the dominance of the colonizer's culture in colonial relationships and that of the majority culture in the post-colonial world that can easily be overlooked as a result of the indiscriminate application of the term hybridity according to its critics. And yet, as Ashcroft sums up his and some like-minded theorists' position, "[t]here is, however, nothing in the idea of hybridity as such that suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it involves the idea of an *equal* exchange" (119).

Nevertheless, Jonathan Friedman further criticizes hybridity for its strong anti-essentialism saying that it is exactly this component in it why "hybrid ideology has been used to dissipate ... resistance by 'creolising' ... from above" (qtd. in Buchanan 175). Postcolonial critics do tend to agree that essentialist discourses of culture must be avoided since they usually lead to discriminatory and racist ideologies; on the other hand, an essentialist approach to culture is paradoxically deemed necessary in the fight for liberation, for decolonization. That is why even such a major postcolonial theorist and deconstructionist as Gayatri Spivak has to acknowledge that "it's absolutely on target . . . to stand against the discourses of essentialism, . . . [but] *strategically* we cannot" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 79).

John Hutnyk expressed his criticism of hybridity, too, in his essay "Adorno at Womad: South-Asian Crossovers and the Limits of Hybridity Talk" in 1997, but the relevance of this article together with the others in the volume in which it first appeared is demonstrated by its re-publication as recently as 2015. Interestingly, he uses World Music as his starting point and specific example of a hybrid art form, whose popularity illustrates its global commodification

and the hegemonic position of hybridity in contemporary discourse on culture, when it is exactly such hegemonic relationships that hybridity was originally supposed to transgress. Hutnyk also draws attention to the issue of appropriation involved in hybrid productions when he asks: “How is it that white British performers can wear Nepalese masks on stage, abstracted from their social and cultural context, without critical comment” (109)? As marketability is of primary importance in relation to cultural production, or rather consumption, today, and World Music is highly profitable, it has become part of the mainstream of culture as the new normal, without disrupting the overarching system (Hutnyk 113). He further explains: “[d]ifference within the system is the condition and stimulus of the market – this necessarily comes with an illusion of equality, of many differences, and, in the bastardised versions of chaos politics which results, the image is of ‘crossed’ cultural forms merely competing for a fair share” (119).

The inclusion of World Music in mainstream culture reveals the plurality and diversity of the latter, which enthusiastically embraces and celebrates this art form, considered and hailed as exotic in this context, and sees nothing oppositional in World Music. It is this loss of the political force of hybridity that Hutnyk laments. In spite of its ambivalent uses and the criticism against it, hybridity is a crucial and unavoidable concept in the analysis of migrant writing, especially in its representation of various diasporic positions.

In Salman Rushdie’s probably best known and most-debated novel *The Satanic Verses*, this “postmodern epic” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 112), which combines apparently conflicting modes of writing including “political satire and religious fable; realism and fantasy” (Head 179), there are numerous instances in which the essentialist notions of a monolithic culture as well as those of a fixed and coherent authentic self are undermined. A prime example is that of Pinkwalla, the deejay of the Club Hot Wax, an albino Indian, “who has never seen India, East-India-man from the West Indies, white black man” (Rushdie, *SV*

292). His speech further illustrates the cultural hybridity he embodies when he raps, “*Now-mi-feel-indignation-when-dem-talk-immigration-when-dem-make-insinuation-we-no-part-a-de-nation-an-mi-make-proclamation-a-de-true-situation-how-we-make-contribution-since-de-Rome-Occupation*” (Rushdie, *SV* 292). Pinkwalla’s use of such linguistic forms underlines his mingling of cultures, which reflects “the fluidly communal and immigrant inflected cosmopolitan culture that Rushdie celebrates” (Innes, *A History* . . . 244).

The nightclub where Pinkwalla works, on the other hand, plays an important role in the political satire of the novel. It is an imitation Madame Tussauds because of its waxworks inside. These, however, are waxworks with a difference: they represent prominent black British figures, “migrants of the past”, such as “Ignatius Sancho, who became in 1782 the first African writer to be published in England” (Rushdie, *SV* 292) or Mary Seacole, an army nurse, like Florence Nightingale, in the Crimean war in the mid-1850s. However, despite the shared nature and location of their professional activities, the two women were each other’s opposites in terms of their racial and social backgrounds. Florence Nightingale was a white woman from the upper-middle class, who was placed by the British government in charge of the hospitals in Scutari, Turkey, during the war. Mary Seacole, on the other hand, was a woman of mixed race, originally from Jamaica, who was determined to care for the wounded soldiers in the Crimean War in spite of the fact that her offer to help was refused by the War Office; consequently, she decided to fund her own trip to Turkey. Eventually, both women were hailed, but while Florence Nightingale was regarded as a heroine upon her return to England, Mary Seacole found herself in such a destitute situation that “in July 1857 a benefit festival was organised to raise money for her, attracting thousands of people” (“Mary Seacole”).

The climax of an evening in the club is the time of the Meltdown when wax effigies of public figures, hated by the visitors coming from the various ethnic communities of colour in

the neighbourhood, are chosen and burnt down to the guests' delight. That is how one night customers witness the melting of Maggie, the Prime Minister of the time. It is due to events like this that the club is the place where, like Saladin Chamcha, one of the two protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, readers come the closest to being directly exposed to radical Black Power politics in Rushdie's novel (Teverson 148). The selection of the wax figures in the club, among other details, is what serves as the basis of Ranasinha's argument, in which she claims that Rushdie "contests the amnesiac, exclusive constructions of British heritage and identity and draws attention to the marginalisation of black contributions to history" (192). At the same time, she draws attention to his self-reflexive critique of minority communities, too (Ranasinha 203).

Rushdie's complex views on politics for and by marginalized groups, questions of the self, and forms of diasporic awareness are combined in the events related to the character Dr Uhuru Simba. He is a political activist forcefully protesting against all forms of racial abuse, but it is hard to grant full readerly sympathy to this far from appealing British-born African "man-mountain" (Rushdie, *SV* 285), with a history of violence against women, "a crazy bastard" and "fucking witch doctor" (Rushdie, *SV* 285) as referred to by one of his female victims. Similarly to some of the other characters like Pinkwalla or Gibreel Farishta, Saladin's counterpart in the novel, the radical activist uses a nom de guerre to replace his original name Sylvester Roberts with; the act signifies the self in flux in his case, too. The English translation of the assumed African name is seen on a badge worn by one of the protesters at a meeting organized after his arrest, for a series of murders, on false charges: "At some angles it read, *Uhuru for the Simba*; at others, *Freedom for the Lion*" (Rushdie, *SV* 413), which expresses his and the campaigners' radical stance relating to the domestic politics of Britain. It is his speech given at his trial in court that both Ian Baucom (215) and Dominic Head (180) regard as Rushdie's manifesto of his ideal multiculturalism. Perhaps, it is because of Simba's

controversial character that comes in for criticism in the novel, too, that his words are not presented directly but are recited by his mother, which makes them more acceptable to the listeners and the readers alike:

“Make no mistake . . . we are here to change things. I concede at once that we shall ourselves be changed; African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cypriot, Chinese, we are other than we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans, if our mothers and fathers had not crossed the skies in search of work and dignity and a better life for their children. *We have been made again*: but I say that *we will also be the ones to remake this society*, to shape it from the bottom to the top. We shall be the hewers of the dead wood and the gardeners of the new.” (Rushdie, *SV* 414, emphasis added)

The words in italics express the essence of what happens in the diasporic space: both the newcomers and the members of the host society are transformed, made new and transculturated in the course of their encounter. In the description of the process of transculturation in the quotation above, Stuart Hall’s ideas concerning cultural *diasporization* as discussed in Sub-chapter 1.2 reverberate: diasporans and members of the dominant culture are both involved in the process of the transformation and construction of identity.

Simba’s death resulting from police brutality is the major cause of the riot that erupts towards the end of the novel. The club where Pinkwalla works is also among the locations that become terribly damaged in these race riots later on. The name of the fictional borough serving as the setting of these events is Brickhall, which is “a conflation of two real locations central to South Asian struggles of the 1970s: Brick Lane and Southall” in East London (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 112). London itself often appears, “in its Indo-Pakistani iteration”

(Bhabha, “How Newness . . . “229), as Ellowen Deeowen, an invented name given to the place by Saladin Chamcha as a child when his fascination with the city starts. One of his favourite playground rhymes expressing his yearning for foreign cities that he often repeats like a mantra is “Elowen Deeowen London” (Rushdie *SV* 37). It is such imaginative constructs, among other things, that keep “flouting any sense of factual reality” (Finney 190) throughout the whole novel and make it impossible to apply a completely realist aesthetics to its reading.

The same can be said about the outskirts of the city mentioned above, which “constitute the decentred ‘centre’ of *The Satanic Verses*”. This area, together with “Jahilia, the Eastern desert city of Gibreel’s dreams, [is also a] ‘nomadic’ centre recently inhabited by migrants . . . [B]oth describe landscapes in a state of constant metamorphosis” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 112). According to Procter, the abovementioned area in London is not primarily a location in the novel where black power politics unfold but a site that “conjures routes . . . [and functions as a] figure connoting a poetics of travel, itinerancy, nomadism” (*Dwelling Places* 113).

In his essay “In Good Faith” (1990), written after the eruption of sometimes even physically violent controversies in the wake of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie, while defending his novel and explaining his motives, explicitly states: “*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. . . . *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves” (394). As the term mongrel can be seen here as a provocatively rude synonym of hybrid, it is worth further examining how the phenomenon of hybridity, a term whose complex theoretical ramifications have been introduced above, is treated in the novel.

The most prominent examples of a variety of hybrid identities as represented in *The Satanic Verses* are provided in the chapters that delineate, much like a *Bildungsroman*, the life stories of the two central characters as they develop in the metropolitan centres of London and Bombay. One of the two men is Salahuddin Chamchawala, a native of Bombay, who, characteristically, simplifies his name while living as an immigrant in England, to Saladin Chamcha and then reverts to the original name upon his return to Bombay, his city of birth, at the end of the novel. The changes in the name are indicative of the transformations taking place inside the character and his shifting identification with his birthplace and country of adoption. However, he is also called Spoono by Gibreel Farishta. As Teverson explains, Chamcha “translates from Hindi and Urdu as ‘spoon’, an idiom for a sycophantic toady” (145), which Saladin really is in his relationship to the English whom he has tried to mimic since his arrival in England to start his public-school education several years earlier.

Chamcha’s linguistic metamorphosis is manifest in more than the way he anglicizes his name: on his flight to Bombay for a theatrical production, he is shocked to notice that “his speech unaccountably metamorphosed into the Bombay lilt he had so diligently (and so long ago!) unmade” (Rushdie, *SV* 34). His Urdu also returns at the end of the novel when he goes back to his birthplace seeking reconciliation with his dying father and reunion with his lover.

Similarly to Saladin, Gibreel Farishta also adopted a stage-name when he became a Bollywood actor. His original name was Ismail Najmuddin but his mother started calling him endearingly farishta, which translates into English as angel. “This identification is emblematic, for when his schizophrenia sets in he imagines that he is Archangel Gabriel – in Urdu ‘Gibreel Farishta’ – and he dreams revelations of the Prophet of Islam” (Kuortti, “*The Satanic Verses* . . . 126). These onomastic changes and linguistic transformations also provide the writer with a means of emphasizing the ongoing process of metamorphosis.

The occupation of either protagonist also involves playing roles, putting on masks, and creating opportunities of multiple identifications: Gibreel becomes a Bollywood film star and Saladin is a voice-over artist. But while “Gibreel plays celestial roles Saladin plays earthly ones, successfully impersonating carpets, baked beans and even the President of the United States” (Kuortti, “*The Satanic Verses* . . . 127). It is worth noting, though, that the complementarity of the two characters can border on interchangeability at times recalling the relationship between Estragon and Vladimir in Beckett’s play, which is further emphasized by the mention of bad breath, an unpleasant trait associated with the latter of the two theatrical characters, which finds its equivalent in Estragon’s smelly feet. Originally, Gibreel’s breath is described as a “breath of rotting cockroach dung” (Rushdie, *SV* 13), which is transferred to Saladin after their fall.

Their interchangeability is obvious even earlier, for example, when the two of them tumble down in “an angelic devilish fall” from the skies into the English Channel in the opening dream-vision sequence. Unaware “of the moment at which the processes of their transmutation” begins by fading, or rather spinning, in mid-air into each other in a self-consciously Joycean manner, their hithertofore distinct identities merge into “Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha” (Rushdie, *SV* 5), combinations reminiscent of the conflation of the protagonists’ names in *Ulysses* as “Blephen” and “Stoom.”¹ Despite their very different character traits and their later murderous enmity assuming mythic proportions as they transmogrify into archangel and arch fiend respectively, Gibreel and Saladin lose their separate identities to be united, onomastically as well as epistemically, into the composite figure of the migrant with his unpronounceably alien, hybridised, compound name. Significantly, such loss of distinct individuality ensues right before their entry, as immigrants, to Britain.

¹ Vijay Mishra notes that Rushdie truly admires James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, which appears to explain the intertextual references to these novels in Rushdie’s work. (“Postcolonial Differend . . .” 95)

With its in medias res beginning, the novel thus introduces the pair on their arrival in England, in the typical situation of immigrants entering the country, in a way. It is an unusual entrance by falling from the sky, from a height of 29,002 feet, the exact height of Mount Everest that Alleluia Cone, a would-be lover that Gibreel is in search of, has climbed. The fall from the sky is the result of an explosion: the airplane Saladin and Gibreel are on travelling to London is blasted by Sikh terrorists having sneaked on board. This explosion is based on a real-life event that occurred in 1985 when Air India flight 182 was blown up in mid-air by Sikh extremists from Canada, an incident which also features significantly in Anita Rau Badami's later novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* The resurfacing of such representations of reality in this and other similar sections of Rushdie's book demonstrates how "contemporary reality constantly erupts into and disrupts the impression that we are occupying a world of pure imagination" (Finney 196). This is the reversal of the technique that has been seen operating in the seemingly more representational and more openly political chapters of the book referred to above, narrative sequences where factual reality is deconstructed in a postmodern fashion. Due to the alternation and mixing of these dissimilar techniques, the novel resists any totalizing discourse and indefinitely postpones closure.

On their way to earth, Saladin and Gibreel already discuss the possibility of being born again, of acquiring a new identity, which raises the issue of splitting selves as is commonly experienced by migrants struggling for survival in the host country. They land in the water of the English Channel, a liminal space between countries and, for the two arrivals, continents (Nasta 165). As these events take place "[j]ust before dawn one winter morning, New Year's Day or thereabouts" (Rushdie, *SV* 3), the two characters are not only in a liminal zone in spatial terms but also in a temporal sense. However, the transformations of the two men start earlier, at home, as signified by Gibreel's name change as well as his choice of a new career by becoming an actor from a tiffin, that is, Indian food, courier; in addition, he also loses his

faith in India, a loss starting the split in him, a process that reaches its climax during his stay in England. Saladin's willed transformation into "a good and proper Englishman" (Rushdie, *SV* 43) also begins in Bombay in his youth. The fact that Saladin's metamorphosis of personal identity starts at home suggests that Rushdie does not regard the construction of identity as an exclusively diasporic phenomenon; for him, transformation is a permanent, transcendental characteristic of the human condition, which makes a pure and fully coherent self impossible. Edward Said seems to be thinking along the same lines when he observes that culture and identity are unsettled and decentred in modern times, and it is the migrant who is the prime embodiment of this universal condition as it has been demonstrated in Sub-Chapter 1.2. While examining Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the reader cannot help noticing the cross-fertilization between the fiction and theory published in the same period of time, which demonstrates an important quality of the intellectual climate of the 1980s and the early 1990s.

After their arrival, Gibreel and Saladin undergo a series of more or less surrealistic reinventions and transformations, culminating in Gibreel appearing like his namesake, the Archangel, with a halo around his head and Saladin developing horns and hooves while turning absolutely hairy, thus becoming the embodiment of the devil himself. Not surprisingly, Gibreel greets Saladin with the following words upon their landing: "Born again, Spoono, you and me. Happy birthday, mister; happy birthday to you" (Rushdie, *SV* 10).

Their landing on the coast of England happens to take place at Hastings, on the private property of Rosa Diamond, who, as a child, had a vision of the landing of the Normans under the leadership of "Willie-the-Conk" (Rushdie, *SV* 129) on the exact same spot nine hundred years ago and still keeps thinking about them. Later, another foreign king of England is recalled by Gibreel: this time the Dutch William III is described as an invader because "[n]ot all migrants are powerless, . . . They impose their needs on their new earth, bringing their own

coherence to the new-found land, imagining it afresh” (Rushdie, *SV* 458). Yet, the death of the foreign-born monarch, related to a freak accident, is also described as making the life of the migrant appear more precarious. These moments of English history suggest that Rushdie’s two protagonists are also part of a long line of immigrants leaving their indelible mark on the land. However, it is far from certain what impact this new generation of migrants will have on England.

Reality resurfaces again in the section of the novel recounting Saladin’s capture by the police. No matter how hard he tries to convince the constables that he is actually a British citizen having been married to an English woman and having worked and lived a decent middle-class life in England for years, the racial prejudice based on the stereotypical view of Pakistani immigrants prevails and Saladin suffers innumerable instances of humiliation at his captors’ hands. Part of the self-justification of the officers is based on what Saladin appears to be like as he gradually turns into a devil-goat literally taking the shape of what the officers call immigrants metaphorically as they demonize them. When it turns out eventually that Saladin is a British citizen, the immigration authorities and the police officers fabricate a cover-up story and take him to a hospital at a Detention Centre.

There Saladin meets other patients-immigrants in the shape of a manticore, a water buffalo, a wolf, slippery snakes, and all sorts of other mutants and monsters. To answer his question how they have acquired these appearances, the manticore explains, ““They [members of the dominant white society] describe us . . . That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct”” (Rushdie, *SV* 168). Resonant of Said’s idea of Orientalism, Søren Frank claims that “[t]he patients all suffer because of Western orientalism . . . To the patients in the hospital, the colonial gaze has become the defining element in their self-understanding and self-image” (148). The power of Western regimes to impose their constructed images on their oppressed subjects and make them experience

themselves as Others has also been pointed out by Stuart Hall, as it has been discussed in Sub-Chapter 1.2 of this dissertation. The episode of the novel set in the hospital ends with a revolt, during which the patients escape from their confinement and run towards freedom: “Instead of being objects acted upon, they become transforming subjects” (Frank 148). In a reverse act of migration, Saladin takes the road east leading to London; consequently, London becomes the migrant Saladin’s east.

In spite of their shared experiences, Gibreel and Saladin differ significantly. Although both of them arrive in London, Saladin, who is turning into a goat-devil, finds accommodation in the attic of the Shaandaar Café among the immigrants of East London, from whom he desperately tries to escape as he says, expressing his cultural denigration: ““You’re not my people. I’ve spent half my life trying to get away from you” (Rushdie, *SV* 253). But finally he accepts the fact that it is this community that can offer help to him just as he also admits that good and evil exist inside him. Eventually he sheds his devilish appearance and realizes that his identity is affected by all his experiences, the effects of Bombay and London alike, and develops a fluid migrant identity that is “shaped as discontinuous leaps” (Frank 144). At different times in the novel, he appears as an Indian boy, an integrationist immigrant, the devil incarnate, a diasporan and, in the end, a returnee to Bombay. Ranasinha calls the image thus created for Chamcha a palimpsest image, an image that Rushdie deploys “to describe the way migrants attempt to deal with their past and origins in London” (218).

By contrast, Gibreel the Archangel spends his first day in the metropolitan city riding its underground in “that hellish maze, that labyrinth without a solution,” “that subterranean world in which the laws of space and time had ceased to operate, . . .” (Rushdie, *SV* 201). He is accompanied by a book, *Geographers’ London A to Z*, which brings to mind land surveyors who went along with the explorers to the uncharted territories to be colonized. Later on, he expresses his purpose in London in a manner reminiscent again of the colonizer describing his

mission: he is in London to save the city, to redeem it (Rushdie, *SV* 323), “to tropicalize” it (Rushdie, *SV* 354). He does not specifically aim at gaining a new identity for himself; instead, his goal is to transform the city. “The method Gibreel uses to position himself as ‘England’s cultural redeemer’ is a colonial one and those who overlook its failure, such as Baucom, also overlook this reality,” argues Sarah Upstone (20). Gibreel believes that he is “the angel of the Recitation” (Rushdie, *SV* 315) in human form and as such, his task is to “to announce and not to act” (Baucom 210).

Gibreel wishes to save the city for multiplicity, for the abundance and superfluity of the thousand and one narratives that are the substance of England’s migrant history. He intends to reveal that England is not unitary, that England’s spaces of inhabitation are not interrupted or vandalized by the returns of the postcolonial migrant, but that Englishness . . . is constituted as an imperfect and perpetually incomplete construction. (Baucom 209)

According to Baucom, Gibreel eventually comes to the realization that “London contains within itself the principle of its own transmutation and redemption” (210) with its multi-layered history and culture, but because all this is mutable, he tries to impose his own vision on it. That is the reason why Kuortti may call him “the purveyor of truth” (“*The Satanic Verses* . . . “129). However, similarly to Upstone, John McLeod is not convinced, either, that Gibreel’s method is the desirable one when he tries to “tropicalize” the city. For McLeod, “The pursuit of absolutes – whether it be by the exiled Imam, Gibreel tropicalizing London or the rioters making the city melt down – destroy [sic] the possibility of love and meaningful change” (*Postcolonial London*157).

Gibreel and Saladin do not only embody different attitudes to London, they also represent different notions of the self. The words of consolation offered to Saladin by Sufyan, his host in the Shaandaar Café and ex-schoolmaster and teacher of Latin from Bangladesh, may be used as an explanation of the underlying dissimilarity between them:

Sufyan, kindly fellow that he was, went over to where Chamcha sat clutching at his horns, patted him on the shoulder, and tried to bring what good cheer he could. ‘Question of mutability of the essence of the self,’ he began, awkwardly, ‘has long been subject of profound debate. For example, great Lucretius tells us, . . . “Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers,” – that is, bursts its banks, – or, maybe, breaks out of its limitations, – so to speak, disregards its own rules, but that is too free, I am thinking . . . “that thing”, at any rate, Lucretius holds, “by doing so brings immediate death to its old self”. However,’ up went the ex-schoolmaster’s finger, ‘poet Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, takes diametrically opposed view. He avers thus: “As yielding wax” – heated, you see, possibly for the sealing of documents or such, – “is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls,” – you hear, good sir? Our spirits! Our immortal essences! – “Are still the same forever, but adopt In their migrations ever-varying forms.”’

He was hopping, now, from foot to foot, full of the thrill of the old words. ‘For me it is always Ovid over Lucretius,’ he stated. ‘Your soul, my good poor dear sir, is the same. Only in its migration it has adopted this presently varying form.’

‘This is pretty cold comfort,’ Chamcha managed a trace of his old dryness. ‘Either I accept Lucretius and conclude that some demonic and irreversible mutation is taking place in my inmost depths, or I go with Ovid and concede that everything now

emerging is no more than a manifestation of what was already there.’ (Rushdie, *SV* 276-7)

From his insistence on the idea of re-birth implied in the religious tenet of metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul, it becomes clear that Gibreel is preoccupied with the idea of metamorphosis and believes in the essence of the self, as expressed in the words of Ovid above, and thus he cannot reconcile his different selves with each other, becoming schizophrenic in the course of the novel and finally committing suicide. On the other hand, although Saladin is shocked by Sufyan’s words, he approaches wholeness at the end of the novel, validating the Lucretian idea of a new beginning after the death of the old self. The complexity of the issue is foreshadowed earlier in the book when, watching a horticultural program on TV, Saladin thinks the following, considering the hybridity of his fragmented self:

On *Gardeners’ World* he was shown how to achieve something called a ‘chimeran graft’ (the very same, as chance would have it, that had been the pride of Otto Cone’s garden); and although his inattention caused him to miss the names of the two trees that had been bred into one – Mulberry? Laburnum? Broom? – the tree itself made him sit up and take notice. There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the metaphoric place of the one his father had chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world [in the Bombay of Saladin’s childhood]. If such a tree were possible, then so was he; he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive. Amid all the televisual images of hybrid tragedies – the uselessness of mermen, the failures of plastic surgery, the Esperanto-like vacuity of much modern

art, the Coca-Colonization of the planet – he was given this one gift. It was enough. He switched off the set. (Rushdie, *SV* 406)

Interestingly enough, Saladin's final recovery from beast to a balanced human being takes place in India, where he returns after giving up his attempts to mimic the English, on the one hand, and to deny his own kind, on the other. He nurses his dying father at home as father and son forgive each other after a lifelong battle. Saladin also finds the love of his life in an old school-mate, all of which lead to the conclusion that it is through facing one's past and confronting death and love that one's life is redeemed (Nasta 169). But all his life has been characterised by constant transformation, which indicates that a pure self is impossible (Kuortti, "*The Satanic . . .*" 132). Based on this, Frank concludes that "Saladin lands somewhere between Lucretius and Ovid" (152) confirming Bhabha's insistence on the novel having no resolution as it leaves Saladin in an in-between position, in constant liminality ("How Newness . . ." 224).

Although Rushdie expressly celebrates mixing and transculturation in his essays, due to the radical indeterminacy of his postmodern discourse in *The Satanic Verses*, his approach to the issue of hybridity involved becomes more uncertain by the end than it might seem at first glance. Not surprisingly, critics' interpretations also vary. Upstone claims that "the realisation of hybrid Britain is incomplete" (21) in the novel and because "Saladin turns his back on" hybridity (Goonetilleke 82), Goonetilleke believes that Rushdie "entertains a doubt and worry regarding hybridity" (82). Frank, however, argues that the question of identity for Rushdie "is a matter of planting the self in several places", which "is illustrated through the fate of the two protagonists, with Saladin being the one who ends up accepting his chimeric identity of multiple roots and therefore surviving" (143).

Although the novel lacks a neat ending, it is still a happy one for Saladin. But the reader cannot help wondering if such a conclusion is compatible with the rest of the narrative, where Saladin is presented mostly as an anti-hero trying, with the bitterly laughable obstinacy of the mimicry-man, to turn himself into the stereotypical proper Englishman. Yet, as he learns to accept the syncrecity of his various selves, in this final chapter of the book, his identity becomes grounded in his place of origin in Bombay (Ball 210), suggesting that survival also depends on an essential belonging. This rootedness is also combined with a demand for the new as expressed by Saladin saying, “Childhood was over, and the view from this window was no more than an old and sentimental echo. To the devil with it! Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born” (Rushdie, *SV* 547). Apart from offering an ironic comment on how Indira Ghandi’s ruthless bulldozers level a whole shanty-town in *Midnight’s Children*, Saladin’s closing remark echoes the words, implying the Lucretian idea of constant renewal, uttered by Gibreel at the very beginning of the novel: “How does newness come into the world?” – Gibreel asks the question. “Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?” – he offers the answer wrapped up in yet another rhetorical question. (Rushdie, *SV* 8) His initial wisdom suggested by the resounding query notwithstanding, Gibreel fails in the end as he commits suicide upon his return to India– unlike Saladin, who returning, survives and even succeeds. Tempting as it might be, though, then to interpret Rushdie’s work along the lines of the binaries pitting failed migrant against rooted native, what we find instead is that Rushdie subverts, here as elsewhere, such easy and fixed oppositions. As renewal is inconceivable without tradition, homecoming is meaningless without the prior experience of leaving. Achieving full humanity is as dependent on having assumed, and then shed, the guise of the devil, as authenticity – if it exists – can only be a function of hybridity.

Chapter 4: The Transitory Lives of Parsis in Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,” reads the first line of a ballad published by Rudyard Kipling (Kipling), that staunch supporter of empire in 1889, writing about colonial encounters from the white hegemonic metropolitan perspective of his time. The words East and West do not only indicate the geographical directions from which the two “strong men” facing each other in the poem come from but also refer to the two distinct civilizations they represent during their encounter in the north-eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Such incidents between individuals and the clashes of their cultures implied in such events as depicted in Kipling’s ballad have provided rich soil for cultural and literary theories to build on ever since as has been seen in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

But what happens if the encounter, a postcolonial one at that, takes place in urban Canada between newly arrived East-Indian immigrants and representatives of mainstream English-Canadian society? That exactly is what ensues in some selected short stories from the collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag* by Rohinton Mistry, a diasporic author, written a hundred years later than Kipling’s ballad. What image, the question suggests itself, of Canada is constructed by the new arrivals? What social and cultural exchange, if any, takes place between the newcomers from the East and members of the host society residing in the West? How do the South Asian diasporans define themselves in the liminal space between the homeland left behind and the new home yet to be established? The deadly showdown between the English colonel’s irascible son and the audacious tribal chief is finally averted by gestures of mutual respect in “The Ballad of East and West”. East may never meet West, concludes Kipling, “But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth” – or so the self-assured

male colonial narrative of the late 19th century goes. But is there any such easy resolution in the postcolonial, diasporic setting of today's Canada? Can two-way esteem, stemming from each party's recognition of the other's virtue, manly or otherwise, result in anything like Kipling's complacent ideal of Pax Britannica? It is questions like these that the present chapter, devoted as it is to Mistry's relevant shorter fiction, endeavours to raise and, where possible, answer.

Indicative of the complexity of the conflicts to be delineated in the following analysis of Mistry's work is the objection raised by Uma Parameswaran to the use of the very term host culture, which is seen by the Indian-born scholar to create divisions and a perceived hierarchical relationship between immigrants of different backgrounds. It is the white Anglo-Saxon culture, implied in the objectionable term, that is regarded as the culture of the host society in contrast to that of immigrants when, as Parameswaran argues, "white Anglo-Saxon culture" merely "happens to be somewhat older than other immigrant cultures of Canada" (79).

Parameswaran's argument emphasizing the similarity of the positions occupied by various immigrant groups in Canada rather than privileging any of them is supported by Bharati Mukherjee, who draws attention to the shared colonial experience of the past in the works of certain writers in the postcolonial dispensation. It is the experience of living in a marginal position that all of these postcolonial writers have in common: "The Indian writer, the Jamaican, the Nigerian, the Canadian and the Australian, each one knows what it is like to be a peripheral man whose howl dissipates unheard. He knows what it is to suffer absolute emotional and intellectual devaluation, to die unfulfilled and still isolated from the world's centre" (Mukherjee qtd. in Hutcheon 75). These writers of various backgrounds may eventually find themselves in the same place of residence due to immigration to Canada, for example. This movement of intellectuals in the postcolonial world replicates the transverse

migration mentioned earlier, which took labourers from one colony to the other within the British Empire.

Linda Hutcheon explicates the situation of the 1980s further by positing that “[t]he specificity of *Canadian* post-colonial culture today is being conditioned by this arrival of immigrants from other post-colonial nations” (79). She hastens to add, though, that there are significant differences between the situation of the various recent postcolonial migrants, be they writers, and that of their long-established postcolonial counterparts in Canada deriving from the circumstances in which their colonial lives unfolded earlier. Hutcheon identifies Canada as a settler colony where the English and French colonizers established themselves in what they perceived to be an empty space, at least in terms of culture and civilization, ignoring the native population already residing in the supposedly largely unpopulated territories. But in such densely populated places as India, where the fiction of empty spaces was clearly inapplicable, “the cultural imposition associated with colonialism took place on the homeground of the colonized people” (Hutcheon 76).

Today, South Asian immigrants arrive in Canada as part of the global flow of people. According to a number of critics, the postcolonial paradigm may not even be a valid means to explore the configurations of such mobile populations’ position any more: both Canada and the countries of the Indian subcontinent have been free of British colonial ties for too long now for such an approach to be employed fruitfully to them, if the prefix “post” is taken to imply some degree of temporal and causal proximity between what went before and what obtains at present. Unlike with such analogously formed terms as the postmodern or the post-totalitarian, where there is no clean break with the past, with the phenomenon still referred to as the postcolonial, the dynamic balance between continuity and disruption has no longer been maintained, with the latter – disruption, that is – having gained preponderance over the former – continuity. In short, the term postcolonial and its attendant critical theories may no

longer be the only or indeed the best heuristic tools to examine the cultural and social situation characterising such long-independent countries as Canada or India, whose colonial pre-history belongs to the distant and fast diminishing past.

The discourse of multiculturalism, which has been a suitable mode of discussing cultural differences in Canadian society and literature from the 1970s on, and which influenced, in significant ways, both the production and the reception of fictional works like Mistry's own *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, may also seem to be fading with the emphasis shifting towards the concept of diversity these days. Indicative of this shift in Canadian political discourse is the fact that the head of the government department responsible for issues related to multiculturalism is called Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism now, at the end of the 2010s. The new designation relegates the term "multiculturalism" to second place from its earlier, very prominent, position of heading the name of the post: the senior government official overseeing the area in question until 2015 held the title "Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship" (Trudeau). Notably, today the relevant government body is simply called the "Department of Canadian Heritage", with no reference in it to multiculturalism at all ("Contact the Department"). From the fact that "multiculturalism" has thus been moved to a less conspicuous place in the minister's title with the term left altogether unmentioned in the department overseen by him, it can be safely concluded that the concept itself has by now lost at least some of the importance attributed to it since the time the principle embodied in it was enshrined in Canada's constitution in 1988.²

To interpret contemporary Canadian literature, Donna Bennett suggests the use of her coinage polybriduity with its obvious reference to the term hybridity, one of Homi Bhabha's central concepts (9). In her view, the neologism polybriduity reflects the diversity of the world

² I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr János Kenyeres, who has called my attention to recent changes in Canada's governmental structure and the mandate letter addressed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to Pablo Rodríguez on the occasion of the latter agreeing to serve as the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism.

of Canadian writing without creating oppositional binaries, which always involve a hierarchical relationship by their very nature. Thus, she belongs to those theorists mentioned earlier who are critical of hybridity due to the supposedly inescapable hierarchical relationship between the two elements participating in its formation. She even finds multiculturalism responsible for creating yet another, “newer kind of doubled cultural identity: the form of ‘hyphenation’ – which encourages individuals to see their identity simultaneously in terms of place of origin and of place of residency” (10). This sense of double identity and the tension resulting from the competition between the divided loyalties involved in it are definitely there in Rohinton Mistry’s short stories discussed below. Most of these short narratives are set in the writer’s native Bombay, with a few presenting “a shuttle movement back and forth, the past and the present, the old country and the new country” (Molnár 38).

As suggested above, Bennett disapproves of the “hyphenated hybridity” produced by the official policy of multiculturalism on the grounds that it only resulted in “the substitution of ‘*other*’ for ‘*two*’ in the famous phrase about Canada’s ‘two solitudes’ – a minority collectively struggling against a dominant culture” (11). But a few lines later she makes concessions stating, “[i]f state-instituted and culturally-sanctioned multiculturalism has been unable to escape our older dualism, it is a well-intentioned failure that reflects on the way official policy can never truly be adequate to the ongoing flux of individual self-identity and lived experience” (11). She makes a clear distinction between what official policy and what literature are capable of doing. She argues that while “official policy must, by simplifying issues, construct or reconstruct binaries . . . literature provides us with narratives created outside the boundaries of bureaucracy in order to articulate complexity and raise exception” (12). Multicultural literature, in her view, can transcend the boundaries of binaries and

through polybrididity can articulate “the complexity, nuance, ambiguity, and richness” of life in a pluralistic and diverse society (12). It remains the task of this chapter to prove she is right.

Rohinton Mistry’s stories were published when ideas of multiculturalism were receiving intense attention and postcolonial criticism was used to discover hitherto unknown layers of Canadian literature. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, also published under the title *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag* in subsequent British and American editions, is a collection of eleven interlinked short stories that form a cycle. Due to “its formal hybridity – part story collection, part novel –”, the short story cycle is “a suitable medium for articulating what Rocio Davis calls the ‘between-worlds’ position of the ‘ethnic’ or migrant writer, and indeed of the postcolonial condition in general” (Morey 30).

The stories in the volume appear to be rooted in the author’s own experience. Like the writer himself, his main characters are of Parsi background from Mumbai formerly known as Bombay. Judit Molnár draws attention to the original meaning of the word Parsi denoting “craftsmen like Mistry himself, a ‘literary craftsman’” (25). The fictional Firozsha Baag is the name of a residential compound in Bombay whose inhabitants are almost exclusively Parsis. Molnár also elucidates the meaning and significance of the Parsi baags, which are “special areas in Bombay that lend a distinct character to the cityscape” (27). The apartment complexes of a baag share a courtyard “that signals the cultural and religious affiliations [of] its inhabitants ... as Mistry’s fiction attests” (Molnár 27). The Indian metropolis Bombay is the home of the majority of Parsis today, whose number is estimated to be around 100,000 worldwide.

As depicted by Mistry, the residents of the Firozsha compound “display a siege-mentality” (Bharucha 25) not unlike the garrison mentality famously described by Northrop Frye to characterize a central preoccupation of the Canadian sensibility (227). However, what the communities of people in the two countries felt the need to defend themselves against is

quite different: in Canada, the garrison mentality was related to the settlers being surrounded by a threatening vast wilderness, while the reasons for the siege-mentality of the Parsis lie in their history. The Parsis have always been a minority group in India first making their appearance on the subcontinent sometime between the 8th and 10th centuries due to the conquest of their homeland in Persia (now Iran) by Muslim Arabs. So their first diaspora on the West Coast of India was the result of their growing conflicts with the newly arrived Muslim conquerors, who challenged both their religious practices and their prosperous trading activities with neighbouring India. But in India, they also had to give up some of their traditions in order to be allowed to practise their ancient Zoroastrian faith.

Later, in British colonial times the Parsis became more Westernized than the rest of the population and worked very closely with their colonial masters accumulating significant wealth, with which they contributed to the prosperity of Bombay in the late 19th century. However, in post-independence India they were looked upon with suspicion with their prominence declining and their influence shrinking as a consequence. In these circumstances after 1947, the year when India gained independence from the British and the subcontinent was partitioned into India and Pakistan, another migration, this time from India to the West, primarily to Canada and the United States, became a chief goal for many Parsis. This second major wave of massive migration resulting in a second diaspora was not without its own traumas, either, as Parsi immigrants were often “lumped together with other Asian groups – specifically Indians” (Bharucha 24), who they wanted to distance themselves from. That may go a long way to explain why a distinct Parsi identity is foregrounded in all of Mistry’s works.

As noted above, one of the major distinguishing features of the Parsis is their religion known as Zoroastrianism. This is what Rohinton Mistry has to say about his relationship to this faith:

“I’m not a practising Parsee [sic] but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed [them] carefully in the same way as I did my homework, but it had no profound meaning for me. Zoroastrianism is about the opposition of good and evil. For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice. We can enlist on the side of good by prospering, making money and using our wealth to help others.” (Lambert)

In light of this, the industrious nature and the business sense of the Parsis described earlier gains new meaning: if you are a Parsi and accumulate wealth, which you then also use for charitable purposes, you are a good Zoroastrian obeying your faith. Discounting its insistence on the freedom of choice where it comes to embracing either good or evil, Zoroastrianism thus displays features not altogether dissimilar to Protestantism, the religion of the white English-speaking colonisers of the Indian subcontinent. The prosperity theory of Protestantism is grounded in the true believer’s moral self-justification found in the accumulation of worldly possessions enabling the rightful owner to collect spiritual goods by “using [their] wealth to help others.” Among other things, this religio-cultural analogy may have played some part in the formation of a relatively conflict-free relationship that characterised the British-Parsi nexus in colonial times. That the same analogy, much weakened by the waning of any form of religiosity on both sides, did anything much to facilitate the integration of the Parsi community into Canada’s largely secularised majority society is highly dubious. Zoroastrian industry here, Protestant work ethic there, Mistry’s short fictions have little to offer in the way of transcultural rapprochement based on the similarity of religious sentiments.

It comes as no surprise, however, that quite a few events in Mistry’s short stories are related to Zoroastrian religious holidays and ceremonies. The religious feasts featuring in the collection include Behram Roje (the Parsi new year) mentioned right in the second paragraph

of the opening story entitled “Auspicious Occasion”: all the unfolding events in the narrative recounted here revolve around this holiday. Several of the stories also include dastoorjis or Parsi priests among the characters; the fire temple, or agyaari in Gujarati, is their place of worship, while doing kusti is a form of private prayer performed with the help of a liturgical accessory, that is a kusti. It is a rope consisting of a number of strands that have to be tied and untied following specific rules, while prayers are being said in this manner. Wearing a sudra, a kind of tunic is also a crucial feature identifying a true Parsi; this religious garment also appears in the last and most anthologized story called “Swimming Lessons”, a story about the adaptation of a young Parsi man to Canada, his new country of residence. The protagonist’s unavoidable acculturation worries his parents back in India as they measure the distance, both geographical and spiritual, their son has travelled by talking about the probable changes in his new life in Canada where he is most unlikely to do his kusti and wear a sudra.

Canada is one of the countries where the second Parsi diaspora found a new home in the postcolonial era. Immigrants from South Asia started arriving in Canada earlier, though. As Vogt-William notes,

Although massive migrations of people from the subcontinent have become more apparent in the latter half of the last century, South Asian diasporic communities have existed in England, the USA, and Canada since the nineteenth century. All three countries are thus linked, both amongst themselves as well with India and the Caribbean, through the history of colonisation and contemporary postcolonial migratory movements. (4)

According to Joel Kuortti, “[i]n the overall history of the South Asian diaspora in North America, we can distinguish three specific periods, or immigration waves, during which there

was a more substantial number of immigrants coming in” (*Writing Imagined Diasporas* 9). By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, there were about five thousand South Asians in British Columbia, 90 percent of whom were of a Sikh farming background, mainly men from the Punjab area in northern India; they were attracted to Canada by employment opportunities. (Buchignani) “After 1909 the immigration rules were tightened in Canada” (Kuortti, *Writing Imagined Diasporas* 10), so the second wave of immigration brought larger numbers of South Asian immigrants to Canada only after the Second World War lured again by higher wages. The third and largest immigration wave occurred in the 1960s in the wake of “the legislative reforms in 1962 and 1967” (Kuortti, *Writing Imagined Diasporas* 10). These South Asians were attracted mostly by the prospect of a better education. By 2011, the number of South Asian immigrants in Canada had totalled around 1.5 million, with 10 per cent of all new immigrants arriving from India that year. It is an extremely varied ethnic group, however; in the Metro Toronto area alone, “over 20 distinct ethnic groups can be identified within the larger (more than 850,000) South-Asian population” (Buchignani). The large numbers and variegated ethnic backgrounds of these newcomers go a long way in explaining why some of these ethnic groups, with the Parsis among them, continue to regard it especially important to distinguish themselves from communities of different ethnic origins also coming from India.

The significance of the greatly varied literature of the South Asian diaspora in Canada has gradually increased since the 1980s with the emergence of writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Anita Rau Badami and Rohinton Mistry. Like the other two authors mentioned here as well as some of their characters, Mistry’s protagonists in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* were also born on the Indian subcontinent, outside Canada. The direction and purpose of the journey of those who decide to leave their homeland in Mistry’s stories are not very specific. Very often, it is not clearly stated at all if they want to go to America or Canada to begin with.

Both countries are west of India with the same attractive opportunities and high standards of living, so it does not really matter if the destination is further north or south.

In the age of global travel, flying across the Atlantic presents immediate difficulties to them, or rather, their parents, mainly in financial terms. Such worries are revealed by the words of Kersi's father in the story "Of White Hairs and Cricket": "Somehow we'll get the money to send you. I'll find a way" (Mistry 112). The journey will take these young men and women from one megacity, Bombay, to another, either New York or Toronto. According to Parameswaran, settling down in big cities is what Indian immigrants to Canada typically do in reality, too (83). She adds: "[t]he city orientation of Indians, compounded by technology's banishment of winter, means that we are not likely to get from Indian writers any first-hand descriptions of the sheer pleasure and terror of skating on a frozen Prairie lake while the ice cracks and roars just below the surface" (83).

The purpose of the journey Mistry's young Parsis intend to make is expressed in similarly vague terms as in "One Sunday": "Vera had gone abroad for higher studies, following her sister Dolly's example" (Mistry 29). In the story entitled "Of White Hairs and Cricket", the father says the following to his son: "And one day, you must go, too, to America. No future here" (Mistry 112). Conversations of a similar drift take place in the family in "Lend Me Your Light", too: "We will miss him if he gets to go ... but for the sake of his own future, he must. There is a lot of opportunity in Toronto" (Mistry 178).

What is common in the stories is that it is always the younger generation that leaves in search of a better life, for education, and they all take the same direction: west of India. After all, this is what the author Rohinton Mistry did when he went to Toronto in 1975, at the age of twenty-three and first started to work in a bank subsequently to enrol in a BA program in English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto. As Peter Morey summarizes the

biographical events of this period in his monograph about Mistry, in the 1960s and 1970s, emigration equated success in people's imagination in India (3).

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that when emigrating, Mistry's characters do not think much of how the natural environment will be different in Canada as they will not have to fight the elements of nature there, unlike the settlers had been obliged to do in the previous centuries. They do not even see anything resembling a wilderness upon their arrival because it is an urban environment that their planes take them to. When it comes to the weather or the climate, the reactions of the narrator-protagonist's parents in "Swimming Lessons" are easily shared by the reader. When the protagonist, a recent immigrant in Canada, describes his winter in Toronto in one of his letters addressed to his parents in India, readers must agree with the parents that the son's description of the Canadian weather conditions only serves the purpose of hiding what is really important to him. As the father says, printed in italics like all the sentences uttered by the protagonist's parents in what is actually his narrative, anybody can go to the local library in Bombay and "*read all about [weather conditions] in Toronto, there they get newspapers from all over the world*" (Mistry 232). The father's conclusion is correct: first-hand experience of exposure to the extremities of an alien climate is simply unavailable or at least irrelevant to those sheltered in the humanised urban environment of the big city in the West.

But when the parents finally receive their son Kersi's short story collection, which, in postmodern fashion, turns out to be the actual book readers hold in their hands in their extradiegetic reality, they start to get a sense of what the son has to cope with in the process of adaptation to the new country, which, indirectly, also explains the situation of the author Mistry himself. It is a real *mise-en-abyme* as the reader, similarly to the parents, reads about a writer, Rohinton Mistry, writing his short stories about a writer writing his short stories. Fiction also turns into meta-fiction when the father provides various theories explaining to his

wife how a writer relies on his memories in the act of artistic creation “*changing some things, adding some, imagining some*” (Mistry 243). The paternal remark unmistakably echoes Salman Rushdie’s thoughts in his essay “Imaginary Homelands” about the possibility of ever knowing or being able to tell the whole truth, about the dispiriting futility of any novelistic attempt “to unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory” (10). In *The Texture of Identity*, a book length study devoted to three writers, including Mistry, of South Asian background, Martin Genetsch argues that the story “Swimming Lessons” has a further postmodern trait in that it “challenge[s] traditional assumptions of a unified meaning being conveyed homogeneously” (218) by offering the possibility of multiple interpretations by different readers. This is exactly what happens when Kersi’s father and mother read their son’s stories in their own different ways with the mother insisting that each version “be respected as equally valid” (Genetsch 218).

An immigrant writer’s crucial dilemma is also expressed by the father when he comments on his son’s story about Canada: “*if he continues writing about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested there in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference*” (Mistry 248). These comments relate to diasporic identity in general and the question of adaptation as well, the degree to which a newcomer’s identity can or must remain unaltered resisting the influence of the mainstream culture. Since parts of the story are alternately set in India and Canada, this structure suggests that their author’s identity is best described as liminal: he is living in a space between his home culture and that of his adopted country. As Genetsch claims, “the story’s oscillation between ‘there’ and ‘here’, i.e. its

dichotomous imagination, could also be read as mirroring the protagonist's uprooting and disorientation" (134).

The oscillation between the home culture and the host culture is approached in yet another way in the story, "Swimming Lessons". The people the I writer-figure of the story meets in Canada and the places he visits there gain meaning only when they are interpreted in terms of his past experience in India. The old man in the lobby of the apartment building in Don Mills, which resembles the Baag, the Parsi compound in Bombay, turns out to be very similar to his grandfather. The attention he gives to this dying man is compensation for his sense of guilt felt over what he could not do for his grandfather in his last days.

The title "Swimming Lessons" is obviously linked with water imagery, which also appears in the descriptions of places located either in India or Canada. Such water-related imagery is used to establish an associative link between Chaupatty beach in Bombay in the writer's childhood and the swimming pool and the bathtub in Toronto in the present. The writer-figure tries to counterbalance his failure to learn to swim in the sea in Bombay resulting from his aversion to the filth in it by attending swimming lessons in the pool in Toronto. No matter how much the location changes due to one city in the East being replaced by another in the West where swimming should be learnt indoors instead of outdoors, the failure is repeated. The scenario displays every crucial feature of what is known as the repetition compulsion in Freudian terms, a psychological phenomenon wherein the traumatised subject feels an irresistible urge to reiterate the original, traumatising incident hoping to gain mastery over the inhibiting situation.

Another, similarly Freudian, interpretation of the core episode in "Swimming Lessons" is offered by Ralph Crane and Radika Mohanram. These two critics endeavour to trace this resurfacing, in the new terrain, of the home left behind to Freud's analysis of the "uncanny" or *unheimlich*. The unfamiliar/the unknown and the native/homelike are soon

conflated because, as they quote the same lines by Freud that are cited above in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the “uncanny in reality is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated only through the process of repression” (ix). In “Swimming Lessons”, the uncanny appears to serve Kersi’s purposes of constructing a new identity, which accommodates—and is accommodated by—the West. That is why the young writer-protagonist allows the familiar from his past in India to be reconstructed in memory and then in a narrative. Based on a related theoretical point made in “The Location of Culture” by Homi Bhabha, Crane and Mohanram argue that “[t]he clear border between the home and the world, the outside and the inside, the public and the private dissolves, and each becomes a part of the other” (x). The two storylines set in Canada and India respectively merge into each other in intricate ways and become so intertwined with the same tropes appearing in both that the diasporic identity of the protagonist shaped under their influence appears to successfully unify his different selves in a fluid state.

What follows from the above is that, what happens later in the bathtub when Kersi takes a deep breath and immerses himself in the water is that he overcomes the psychological barrier that caused his failure both on Chaupatty beach and in the swimming pool earlier. He gains new strength and a new vision, a new understanding as he says: “The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see what is inside” (Mistry 249). Finally, he is able to face his own predicament, which gives enough inner strength to him to decide to attend the spring session in the swimming pool, to take another chance to cope with the unknown outer world, to inhabit his diasporic space. In psychological terms, the repetition compulsion here holds out the promise of an eventual resolution. In an allegorical reading, submersion in and emergence from the bathtub water is Kersi’s moment of rebirth.

Judit Molnár offers further insight into the meaning of the episodes centring on its water imagery. She states that “[a]ll three places represent life in their own special way. In the

first two instances water is something to stay away from: the water is filthy at the beach, Kersi is not good at swimming in the pool. Water in the bathtub, the most intimate of all these places, forces him to see” (37). Expanding the meaning of water, Gabriel interprets it as a metaphor; as such, experiences connected to water signal possibilities of belonging to the places where they appear. Attempts to swim on Chaupatty beach and in the swimming pool end in failure because of Kersi’s unwillingness to attach himself to either of these places, which represent India and Canada respectively. But in the last episode of the story linked to water, which takes place in the bathtub, Kersi begins to understand and accept his diasporic condition as he moves in and out of the water. It is important that this revelation involves bodily movement. The movement in and the movement out of the water is necessary and one is inseparable from the other as his Indian side is inseparable from his Canadian side; they together offer hope to him to adapt to Canada without forgetting about his roots in India. In Gabriel’s view, this “points to Mistry’s ideas about the fluid contours of . . . identity” (37).

Similarly, the importance of vision, both physical and psychological, is highlighted by the title of an earlier story in the collection called “Lend Me Your Light”. “[T]hemes of connection and disconnection between past and present, and past and present selves, along with storytelling and types of journey, are explored” (Morey 57) here as they are in “Swimming Lessons” discussed above. As the epigraph makes it clear, the words of the title “Lend Me Your Light” are taken from a poem by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, but in the rest of the story the influence of European literary traditions, the poetry of T.S. Eliot most prominently among them, is just as salient due to the intertexts Mistry employs. For example, before his departure for Toronto, Kersi the protagonist thinks the following: “Half-jokingly, I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias,

blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto ...” (Mistry180).

The Eliotian reference to Tiresias from *The Waste Land* is especially apt: he is a mythical prophet bridging two different worlds just as Kersi, who is also the narrator of this story, too, tries to. Tiresias is also the one blessed or cursed with the gift of “second sight” or, in simpler terms, the ability to see with the mind’s eye. The importance of seeing the light in its various implications is further emphasized by the circumstances in which Kersi eventually leaves India as he suffers from conjunctivitis and has to wear dark glasses. The infection of his eyes obscures his vision in the physical sense, but the episode also gains metaphorical meaning later on in the story since Kersi expresses a strong desire for “a lucidity of thought” (Mistry 185). For a while he thinks he has gained a clearer view of his situation as an immigrant in Canada and an emigrant from India, but after his visit to India the above lines identifying him with (a modified Eliotian) Tiresias are repeated with some slight but significant changes, which challenge his earlier conviction and provide the story with ontological uncertainty as he says, “I mused, I gave way to whimsy: I Tiresias throbbing between two lives, humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me ...” (Mistry 192). Needless to say, while Eliot’s – and the Greek myth’s – Tiresias is a sex-shifter, Kersi’s ontological uncertainty derives from his ambiguous ethnicity. The point, however, is that the character in question can no longer take his identity for granted.

Kersi’s story of immigration to Canada and the following visit back home in India represents one of the three options offered in the story to be explored parallel to each other. His brother Percy chooses to stay at home and live the exemplary life of a Parsi following the Zoroastrian maxim of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds (Mistry 236). He and several of his friends go to a village in the countryside working for a charitable agency to help farmers in their fight against usury and corruption only to be driven away by village thugs,

probably hired by the money-lenders themselves. Yet, Percy remains an idealist all the way in spite of the fact that Navjeet, one of his friends, gets killed and the efforts of his charity are frustrated time and again.

One of Percy's friends called Jamshed represents another, completely different approach to the issue of immigration. He leaves India to settle down in New York and his aim is nothing but assimilation. To what extent he succeeds is a question, though. He believes that he has fully acculturated himself to the values of America: he has become a crass materialist who calls on Indians to "learn to stand up for their rights the way people do in the States" (Mistry 185), and gives voice to the rags-to-riches ideology telling Percy: "There, if you are good at something, you are appreciated, and you get ahead" (Mistry 192). He also "perpetuates stereotypes about the inferiority of Indians" (Heble 57) describing them as "too meek and docile" (Mistry 185) living in a country where "[n]othing ever improves, just too much corruption. It's all part of the *ghati* mentality" (Mistry 181). Yet, he keeps returning to his country of birth in spite of his arrogantly condescending and cynical attitude to the people there. He feels nothing but contempt for the crowds of Indians trying to make ends meet and is completely baffled by Percy's decision to remain there. But his trips to India indicate that he cannot sever his ethnic ties as he cannot get rid of Indian expressions locating him in a clearly identifiable Indian context, either. As Heble argues,

Deriving its contemporary usage from the context of India's hardy mountain dwellers, the term "*ghati*," as it is used both by Jamshed and by Kersi's parents, becomes a derogatory label for Maharashtra's common labourers. The "ghati mentality" to which Jamshed alludes thus has a certain kind of cultural resonance: the very phrase serves to remind us that Jamshed has grown up at a particular time and as a member of a privileged class in India. (59)

In spite of his denial, Jamshed has a hybrid identity, which shows the limitations of his assimilation to American culture and the impossibility of discarding his past without a trace.

Kersi's position is somewhere between the two extremes represented by Percy and Jamshed (Heble 57) since his attitude is much more ambivalent than that of either of them in relation to both his country of origin and land of adoption. To connect the familiar from the past and the unfamiliar in the present while living in Canada, to discover the homely in the unhomely in Toronto, Kersi visits Little India, becomes a member of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario and tries to find opportunities to socialize with people from Bombay, members of his own diaspora. Unlike his attempt to make sense of his liminal position in the final story of the collection, "Swimming Lessons", his efforts to reconcile the two worlds of his life here in the earlier narrative lead to disappointment: all he finds is fake imitations of the home left behind, incongruous with the new setting. His fellow diasporans are superficial and only interested in material gain. He appears purposeless and envious of his brother Percy; he thinks the following after reading one of his letters: "There you were, my brother, waging battles against corruption and evil, while I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada. Or attending dinner parties at Parsi homes to listen to chit-chat about airlines and trinkets" (Mistry 184).

However, during his visit back in India, what Kersi sees confuses him the same way as his Canadian experience and raises questions as to the lucidity of his thoughts he was so sure of having developed when observing his homeland from a distance. The parched land around the airport is "brown, weary, and unhappy" (Mistry 186), naked children run around "screaming for money" (Mistry 187) and Bombay itself is dirty and crowded. He is ashamed of sharing some of Jamshed's views but he has to admit that in the city of his birth he feels alien like a tourist, so he says, "Hostility and tension seemed to be perpetually present in buses, shops, trains. It was disconcerting to discover I'd become unused to it" (Mistry 187).

He is also shocked by noticing that he has become similar to the fellow expatriates he met and despised in Canada. Similarly to them, his emotions find expression in material goods that he buys for his relatives and friends left in India. “What was I hoping to barter them for? Attention? Gratitude? Balm to soothe guilt or some other malady of the conscience? I wonder now. And I wonder more that I did not wonder then about it” comments Kersi on himself retrospectively (Mistry 186). Upon his return to Canada, what he unpacks again are commercial items made for tourists: “little knick-knacks bought in handicraft places and the Cottage Industry store” (Mistry 192). Eventually, he must come to the painful realization that he is doubly displaced since he does not yet belong to Canada and he is similarly alienated from his country of birth. His experience of occupying an in-between place is far from the celebratory stance that Homi Bhabha attributes to the liminal Third Space. However, he also recognizes that his diasporic identity, which contains both his ethnic heritage and signs of accommodation to Canada, is not a fixed entity but a fluid, ongoing process as he talks about future trips to come as well as the possibility of a future revelation to shed light on his dilemmas: “Gradually, I discovered I’d brought back with me the entire burden of riddles and puzzles, unsolved. The whole sorry package was there, not lightened at all. The epiphany would have to wait for another time, another trip” (Mistry 192). Although the story ends with Kersi’s sense of failure to fully understand his diasporic position, “to evaluate his situation in Canada as someone who is essentially homeless” (Genetsch 128), Kersi’s quoted words suggest that the story does not preclude an eventual solution to Kersi’s riddles and the possibility of an acceptable Canadian identity as is seen in “Swimming Lessons” (Genetsch 129).

There are altogether three stories in Mistry’s collection thematising the experience of immigration/emigration. The third one entitled “Squatter” is among those which pose the question of cultural adaptation: in a painful but humorous tone it gently ridicules both the

main character Sid/Sarosh and the Canadian multicultural policy of the time. Criticism of the latter as a ploy to cover discrimination is most obvious in the description of the Multicultural Department provided by Nariman, the narrator of Sarosh's story within the story:

“The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures—that’s their favourite word, mosaic—instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner.” (Mistry160)

The key concepts of multiculturalism are presented ironically to have turned into clichés and only hide a hypocritical attitude to newcomers in the country. Although racism and hostility towards new arrivals in Canada also feature in both “Squatter” and “Swimming Lessons”, Mistry’s stories are not to be read as discouragement from emigration since in “Squatter” stories of successful settlement abroad are also mentioned when Vera and Dolly, two girls who grew up in Firozsha Baag are remembered. ““Those two girls went abroad for studies many years ago and never came back. They settled there happily,”” (Mistry 153) Nariman reminds his audience.

Sarosh, the young Parsi immigrant from Bombay, who changes his name to Sid in Canada in an attempt to assimilate to the mainstream of the new society only to rid himself of his Anglicised name when he returns to India, sets a time limit of ten years for himself to fully conform to Canadian cultural norms. He desires “to erase the traces of his cultural difference” in order to be reborn as a Canadian (Genetsch 121). He automatically alters his name upon his arrival in Canada and tries to learn all the Western habits. The title of the story as a homonym first suggests to the reader that it refers to an immigrant as an undesirable alien wanting to

occupy space for himself illegally by trespassing on someone else's property. But it is soon revealed that the word actually refers to the traditional Indian way of defecating, which the protagonist cannot get rid of, indicating his cultural dislocation resulting in his failure to fully adapt to Western culture and civilization. The excremental satire implied in the metonym here is truly Swiftian in nature (Genetsch 123) and "questions a purely mechanistic view of identity formation" (Genetsch 123).

When complete assimilation proves to be impossible because the protagonist "fails to cope with what he assumes to be the cultural conventions of the Canadian diaspora" (Genetsch 125), Sid/Sarosh returns to the country of his birth as promised. On his flight from Canada back to India, on the reverse journey, in the literal in-between space, what has proved to be unattainable for him for ten years is suddenly realized in the on-board washroom cubicle. But it is too late now and Sarosh cannot return to Canada where he remained alienated even at the end of his ten-year long sojourn. Yet, it is equally impossible for him to recover his old place in India because he himself has changed, and India itself has become different:

Weeks went by and Sarosh found himself desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago. . . . He went walking in the evenings along Marine Drive, by the sea-wall, where the old crowd used to congregate. But the people who sat on the parapet while waves crashed behind their backs were strangers. . . . The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain. (Mistry 167)

Consequently, Sarosh finds himself an outsider in his ancestral home, too, experiencing displacement. In the final account, his failure both in Canada and in India appears to stem from his inability to accept his Otherness.

Being an immigrant in Canada obviously entails differences of identity and it is these differences that Sarosh wants to discard completely, which is at least partly the reason for his inability to integrate into Canada's multicultural society. "[H]e essentializes his own racial identity and internalizes dominant Euro-American discourses on normality, progress, and modernity, all of which prevent him from claiming a place in Canada" argues John Eustace (30).

But when Sarosh travels back to India, he similarly fails to realize that, as Kuortti puts it, "[r]eturn indicates a transformation due to which return to the 'same' is not possible" (*Writing Imagined Diasporas* 128). It is not only true in Sarosh's diasporic journeys but this experience is also prefigured by such a classic of ancient literature as Homer's *Odyssey* or its modern reworking, the Nostos, or homecoming, episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Here it is Odysseus who has to disguise himself on his return in order to avoid being slain on his own doorstep, there it is Bloom who has to come to terms with his wife Molly's un-Penelope-like faithlessness. In neither case can a self-identical hero return to an unchanged home – as is the case in the conclusion of Misty's "Squatter", too. Whether back in India or away from "home" in Canada, the domestication of the *unheimlich* remains as doubtful here as the successful resolution of the repetition compulsion was left undecided in "Swimming Lessons" above.

The stories by Rohinton Mistry discussed in this chapter are full of ambiguities in their portrayal of diasporic identity and the relationship between one's home country and land of adoption. The characters who have experience of the cultures of both places fail, remain doubtful or have some faint hope as to the possibility of a successful adaptation to a new society, while remaining in India has its own frustrations and traumas and a return there is equally fraught with trials and tribulations. Mistry's narratives in the collection also caution readers not to be blind to the complexities of various critical positions in relation to the

diaspora experience. West may not remain wholly the West and the East can become quite a bit like the West but on what terms the “twain” can meet is a question that cannot be answered in any definitive way. Certainly not on the basis of any reading – postcolonial, Freudian or otherwise – of Rohinton Mistry’s short stories in the collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

Chapter 5: Re/Constructing Home in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind*

Mem

As it has been demonstrated in the previous chapter concerning Rohinton Mistry's short stories and will be seen in the following analysis of Badami's first novel, the relationship of the diasporic subject to home, regardless of its specific location in a landscape or a mindscape and its manifold implications, is a central question in diasporic writing and plays a significant role in the formation of diasporic identity as well. The desire to belong to what one might call the home of his or her own is more complex than a search for roots, a nostalgia for the past, a wish to return home or to have a homeland; the intricate nature of this wish on the part of the diasporan has already been indicated in the discussion of Avtar Brah's use of the term she coined, the "homing desire". Especially in a diasporic context, the concept of home involves multi-locationality in terms of geographical places and cultural terrains while demolishing psychic boundaries, too (Brah 194). As a result, the notion of home "has to be redefined in the liminal spaces between two or more cultural dwellings" (Zhang 30). Due to the fluid and unbounded character of diaspora space and the multiple relocations and dislocations of the diasporan, the search for a home in this space "implicates a paradoxical, multilayered dehomeing and rehomeing process" (Zhang 31). If the wording of Zhang's observation brings to mind concepts of the *unheimlich* and the uncanny, Laurel Ryan evokes the Freudian dichotomy of the homely and the unhomey even more explicitly when she states, "[t]he drive to find and go home presupposes a separation from the familiar and the homely. . . . There is no home without a pre-existing dislocation from it. . . . Paradoxically, 'home' becomes an attempt to reclaim something that never was, to find something that did not exist before it was lost" (106). It is this search for a home and its meaning that features prominently among the themes of Anita Rau Badami's book *Tamarind Mem*. In this

novel of several doublings, recognizing the presence or the absence of the homely in the unhomely has serious consequences for the protagonists as will be demonstrated below.

As mentioned earlier, even the title of the novel exists in two versions: *Tamarind Mem* was published as *Tamarind Woman* in its later American editions and signals the interconnectedness of cultures and the inseparable nature of aspects of cultural heritage. The word woman is actually the English near-equivalent of mem in the original title. Mem is short for memsahib, the Hindi word used to designate a white, foreign woman of high social standing, most often, but not exclusively, the wife of a British official living in India. In the novel, it refers to one of the main character-narrators called Saroja, the mother figure, who is from the higher social classes being the wife of not an Englishman, but an Indian official with a prestigious job. Her husband is a railway engineer, who, as such, has inherited the job and the concomitant social status of an Englishman as it was the British who had installed and operated a system of railways on the Indian subcontinent during colonial times. Tamarind is a word similarly related to the region because, as it is explained on the dedication page, it is the name of a tree, indigenous to India. The fruit of this tree tastes sour and can cause ceremonies to turn into inconvenient and fruitless affairs; according to superstition, the spirits of the tree do not allow travellers sleeping in its shade to survive.

In Badami's novel, the name tamarind mem with all its ominous associations is given to Saroja by her servants because her sharp tongue can hurt like the acidic fruit of the tree. Her daughter Kamini, the other narrator-protagonist is not wholly unlike her mother in this respect. It is Kamini who immigrates to Canada and it is by tracing her story that the author can explore the diasporic consciousness of a new arrival in the country. Remembering the ancestral home in India and recreating the past there while coping with her sense of displacement in the host society are key thematic features of this novel.

Although it is obviously not a straightforward autobiography, the narrative featuring Kamini as its protagonist is similar to the life-story of the author in many ways. Badami arrived in Canada with her husband and son in 1991 and settled down in Calgary, the same place that serves as Kamini's new place of residence. Her father, like the fictional father figure, was a mechanical engineer working on the railroads, because of which both Badami's and her fictional character Kamini's family frequently had to relocate to new and often distant dwellings, without having the opportunity to be firmly grounded in any of the locations where they were obliged to take up residence. A further analogy between life and fiction here is that author and narrator alike were educated by Irish nuns in convent schools. At school the nuns taught Badami Greek and Roman myths as well as Celtic tales. "The only mythology I don't remember learning in school was Hindu mythology," recalls Badami, which is clearly the legacy of the colonial past ("Author Biography"). At home, however, Badami was immersed in the cultures and myths of her family and of the multilingual railway workers and she took joy in this multiplicity of cultures surrounding her. On the other hand, the fictional character Kamini often ridicules her pious teachers providing her with didactic instructions and lessons from the Bible, often incompatible with her daily life. One last important similarity between author and protagonist is the fact that Badami, like Kamini, started graduate studies in Calgary; in fact, the novel *Tamarind Mem* was first drafted as Badami's MA thesis project in the Creative Writing programme.

Similarly to Randhawa in her *A Wicked Old Woman*, Badami gives voice to different generations of women, thus trying to redress the omission or marginalisation of these gendered age-groups in the creative literature of the past. To do so, she often presents the mother and daughter figures of her novel in conversation with each other. This technique links her to an iconic Canadian mainstream author Margaret Atwood, too. But while a heavily fictionalised foremother is recreated by Margaret Atwood in the eponym of her early poems collected in *The*

Journals of Susanna Moodie, with whom the lyrical I of the poems can enter into dialogue, Badami's narrator Kamini in the first part of her book has private talks, presented as real in the fictional world of the novel, with her actual, biological, mother. This part of the novel is Kamini's first person narrative.

The mother's own life story also recounted in the protagonist's, the mother's, own words in the manner of an autodiegetic narrative unfolds in the second part of the novel. Either part of this double narrative is further duplicated, as Kamini the daughter does not only reflect on her present in Canada where she has come to pursue further studies in chemistry at university but she also narrates the familial past of her childhood to the point of leaving her home in India. Told in the first person, both sequences of the first large part of the novel are narrated by Kamini in the past tense. Her mother Saroja's part is also twofold and similarly alternates between the past and the present since she recalls her life experiences to an audience of first three and then four women travelling with her in a Ladies Only compartment of a train. This allows Saroja to receive and add present comments on the past. Saroja uses present tense forms on both temporal levels providing a sense of immediacy, which is more restrained in Kamini's part perhaps because the latter narrative is more closely autobiographical and the author preferred to keep her distance from memories evoking distressingly, and thus distractingly, intense emotions in her. Due to these narrative strategies, past and present constantly intersect, so there is no present without the perspective of the past seriously influencing the characters as they are and no past either without the distorting or complementing perspective of the present as discussed below.

In this novel of several narrative threads arranged in two main parts, taking place in two different countries on two different continents and narrated by two women belonging to two different generations, one might expect the events and ideas to form easily identifiable binaries. However, it will be revealed that in spite of the novel's embeddedness in definitely recognizable

spaces and cultures, especially where India is concerned, there are more similarities between the two lives than their narrators would be willing to acknowledge.

Story-telling plays an essential part in both women's lives. There is hardly anybody among Kamini's relatives and acquaintances who does not have a tale to tell. Some of these inserted narratives have to do directly with Kamini's practical education. These include her ayah's (or nanny's) cautionary tales populated with every manner of scary monster told in order to prevent her from any wrongdoing, or later her mother's pieces of advice about the proper behaviour or dress-code for girls handed out to her during her baths. In this novel based on psychologically realistic observations, the stories always fit the child's life and correspond to her consciousness of the world. For example, their barber's story of a mysterious beauty whose whereabouts are unknown after her escape from a nawab's (a Muslim ruler's) harem sparks Kamini's imagination and she believes her friend's mother hidden in her sartorial concealment called *purdah* to be the runaway beauty. All these stories play an important role in situating the little girl in a web of relationships as well.

The most important stories, however, are based on memories and come from Kamini's relatives and relate to her family background, her roots, thus shaping her Indian identity. Like a true *Bildungsroman*, Kamini's narrative of her childhood begins, not surprisingly, with a birth, not her own though, because she cannot recall that but her sister's, which prompts reminiscences of her aunt about Kamini's mother's birth, both events having taken place in the same ancestral home, the house of Kamini's maternal grandparents in Mandya, southern India. These personal memories are entwined with details of, and comments on, other events from the life of the family and India's history, similarly to what can be observed about in another Indian-born migrant writer Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. "The year you were born, the whole country collapsed," says the aunt referring to Kamini's birth and the Indo-Chinese war of 1962 (Badami 14) – a coincidence of personal and national history much like Saleem Sinai's birth in

Rushdie's novel occurring at the precise moment of India's independence and partition at midnight, 15 August 1947. Although Badami openly acknowledged her indebtedness to Rushdie when saying she was part of the tradition that had begun with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the tradition she calls "the post-colonial-immigrant school" ("Author Biography"), unlike Rushdie's book foregrounding questions of historiography, Badami's novel examines relationships that women form against the rich texture of life in India, where references to important moments in the history of the country function as chronology. For Badami, the emphasis clearly shifts from *grand récit* to *petit histoire* or, in plain English, her focus always moves to the personal, the domestic, and the biographical.

The moments when Kamini sits on her father's lap to listen to his stories each time he returns from his journeys from work on the railroads are as precious for her as his presents – if not more so. These stories foster a bonding between father and daughter without either of them deliberately aiming to strengthen such a mutual relationship. It is also in this manner, from memories turned into stories told by her other aunt her father's sister that Kamini learns about her father's ancestral home. This paternal home Kamini never actually gets to see: it only exists in tales because the whole village is gone now, probably washed away by the sea. As is this bygone ancestral village, Kamini's reality at large is invested with meaning by her imagination.

Due to this mixture of fact and fiction, the question of veracity is openly addressed by various characters in the book: memories "are pictures we create in our hearts ... And each of us uses different sticks of chalk to colour them'," says one of Kamini's aunts (Badami 71). "The past changes in the context of the present," remarks Saroja (Badami 254); "Memories were like ghosts, shivery, uncertain, nothing guaranteed, totally not-for-sure," comments Kamini (Badami 73). Kamini in Canada and several people in India raise the same question at various times, the question whether anything in the world is a fact (Badami 66), which puts the issue of veracity

onto a generalised epistemological level and raises the novel above its immediate concern with growing up as a girl in India.

Kamini's memories are often induced by her longing for a home, which, at the time she is first presented in the novel, she still locates in the India of her past. In her attempts to reconstruct this home, her recollections of her childhood and youth are frequently tinted with nostalgia. As Walder explains, "[t]he word 'nostalgia' comes from two Greek roots, though it did not originate in Greece; . . . From 'nostos'—returning home, and 'algia'—pain or longing, the term was created by Johannes Hofer, in a 1688 medical dissertation for the University of Basel" (8).³ It is to be noted that the Latinised Greek compound is a mirror translation of *Heimweh* in Hofer's native German, and so is the term's English equivalent *homesickness*, a semantic feature whose significance is referred to below ("Homesickness").

In its later interpretation, however, nostalgia "becomes a state of mind rather than a physical condition" (Walder 8). In her diasporic position, Kamini has an emotional need to anchor herself because, in striking contrast to her life in India bustling with people and their stories, there is hardly any human presence in Kamini's Canada, which brings into sharp focus her alienation in the new country. To overcome her alienation, she relies on her memories of home because the emergence of its features in her Canadian setting makes it more familiar, so it becomes easier for her to relate to it. In other words, the effect of nostalgia inscribed in the term's etymology and its German-English equivalents is in a way reversed. Rather than induce pain by reminding the subject of an absence, the evocation of memories related to the homeland alleviates the distress caused by the radical unfamiliarity of the new environment by imaginatively comparing it to the left-behind familiar. Nostalgic pain is thus turned into its opposite, This ambiguity of *nostalgia* is in a way similar to the equivocal signification of the

³ My thanks go to Dr Judit Molnár for pointing out the significance of nostalgia in diasporic writing and explaining the meaning of the term by referring me to its etymology.

term *unheimlich*, which can both mean unfamiliar and not-hidden, that is, unveiled or familiar as discussed above.

Although Mistry's protagonist in "Swimming Lessons" is surrounded by people in the apartment building where he lives in Canada, he does not know their names and "merely refers to them metonymically" often identifying them by their outward appearance (Genetsch 129-30). This reductive image of Canada (Genetsch 130) he has indicates his social isolation and presents him as a displaced outsider similar to what Kamini appears to be in *Tamarind Mem*. Already at the beginning of Badami's novel, Kamini's list of her impressions of Canada is the complete opposite of what characterized her past life: she is enveloped in silence, freezing cold and thick snow in her unfamiliar present place of residence. Her mother is only able to refer to her daughter's strange environment as "that Calgary North Pole place" (Badami 2), using this hyperbolic-hyperborean cliché on the phone, which indicates her lack of understanding of the complex and often contradictory reality of her daughter's distant land.

Paradoxically, it is the features of the home Kamini left behind in India and her childhood experiences whose resurfacing through memory makes it possible for her to establish a connection with the new, alien land. The curious doubling of observations facilitates her overcoming the sense of dislocation she is daily confronted by. Gradually, Kamini provides a growing number of details of the Canadian landscape. Just like in her narrative of India teeming with images of vegetation, depictions of smells and tastes, she comments on the same aspects of the Canadian environment. Consequently, she can make connections by relating her experiences gained at home to those acquired later in the unfamiliar, new country of settlement. For example, in the shape of the distant mountains, which must be, even unnamed, the Rockies, around Calgary, she seems to recognize the Eastern Ghats, these mountains along the eastern coast of India. Later, the sprouting dandelions seen in Canada bring to mind the besharam plants that decorated their Ratnapura house (Badami 137). These

are instances that make the unhomely familiar, with which Badami continues the tradition of much immigrant writing and art starting from Paul Kane (Francis 7), and Susanna Moodie. Arguably, this is only the beginning of the complex process of adaptation to the new conditions because it is done on the terms of the imported culture.

Another small sign of breaking out of her isolation and entering into dialogue with people in Canada while retaining her Indian identity can be witnessed in the episode where Kamini, while babysitting for her neighbour, spreads out her mother's postcards to Claire, the little child and they "cook up wild adventures for the travelling mommy" together (Badami 58). She also entertains the girl with stories about her stay-at-home relatives and their servants, recreating the atmosphere of her own childhood in this foreign land and, while reliving the past, reviving her old tradition of oral storytelling. However, this situation is a universal childhood experience, but because it resembles so many similar previous situations in the novel embedded in an Indian context, it is possible to relate it, too, to the tradition of the Indian oral narrative. It is due to such a constellation of the specific characteristics of the Indian background of the novel that it resists totalizing universal narratives.

While instances like the ones cited above suggest the possibility of rehomeing for Kamini in yet another sense, that is Kamini's ability to construct a new home for herself in Canada, it is her dislocation, loneliness and isolation both from the ancestral home and the host country, features of the expatriate experience (Kanaganayakam 205-6) that prevail as recurrent motifs in the narrative of Kamini's life. She is still predominantly concerned with coming to terms with her past, especially her mother's behaviour. This focus on India, the homeland in the novel, connects the book with an old trend in South Asian Canadian writing identified by Uma Parameswaran, namely the fact that South Asian authors tend to eschew representing the Canadian setting (85). Whether the "'pre-' or 'non-Canadian' settings and preoccupations of many South Asian Canadian texts," as noted by Pirbhai ("Introduction" 12), is indeed related to

Canadian publishers and immigrant writers recent discovery of “the postcolonial as a marketable category,” as Donald C. Goellnicht believes (qtd. in Pirbhai, “Introduction” 11), is an issue that cannot be addressed in any satisfying way within the confines of this chapter of the dissertation. What can be established with a great degree of certainty, however, is that whatever extrinsic considerations may have played a part in Badami’s decision to locate the present recollections and past lives of her protagonists in India, the South Asian components of her novel combine into an organic artistic whole with the narrated events unfolding in the Canadian location of her story.

The specific reason why most of Kamini’s attention is focussed on her mother is that she still feels neglected and overpowered by her. As she says, “Ma still wanted to win every argument, she would never-ever change” (Badami 3), or “I waited for her to interpret the silences between my words, to sense my loneliness, to say, ‘Why don’t you just come back home, I need you, I am getting old.’ I would drop my work and catch the next flight back” (Badami 15). This wish of the diasporan to return home is in contrast with her desire expressed some years earlier when she first thought of leaving India: “I had to get away from my mother. As quickly as possible. . . . I stayed awake till two-three o’clock in the morning, my one ambition being to finish school and get out of the house, away from Ma” (Badami 122). The ambiguities of the relationship are only resolved in Canada when Kamini gains some critical distance from it in time and space and is able to re-evaluate her earlier one-sided view and forgives her mother for her seeming insensitivity towards her:

Ten years ago I felt a simmering resentment against my mother. I believed that she had wronged Dadda with her rigid anger, her unkind words. I refused to acknowledge the years that Ma had spent being a good wife How bored she must have been. . . .

Perhaps Dadda was to blame for the person Ma had become. He shut her into rooms from which there was not even a chink of escape. (Badami 147)

A statement like this is indicative of Kamini's maturity resulting from her growing self-knowledge and knowledge of others.

In a novel where one of the subjects is the experience of growing up, it comes as no surprise to find nursery rhymes such as "Baa-baa black ship / Have you any oon? / Yessir, yessir then bags phull" (Badami 230). It is a familiar piece but not when spelt in this way. An easy explanation for the unusual spelling might be that this is how a child learning a language mishears the unfamiliar words. Without suggesting any direct "influence," it may be worth noting that the incident is clearly reminiscent of little Stephen Dedalus in the opening sequence of James Joyce's *Bildungsroman, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* mispronouncing a line in "his song" as "the green wothe botheth," meaning the green rose blossoms (Joyce 3). There are important differences here, though, between the two representations of distorted nursery talk. For one, the rhyme in Badami's novel is cited in the second part of the novel narrated by the mother, who speaks proper English, though not as her mother tongue. What is reproduced here is the way the uneducated but snobbish Linda Ayah teaches Kamini and her sister what she believes to be the appropriate language in an educated, high-caste family to counterbalance Saroja the mother's "careless Hindu ways" (Badami 230). This hybridized language combines the English text with the local accent.

It is not only through episodes like this that the novel gives the impression of India being a postcolonial, multi-cultural society, labels used to describe Canada too. The same impression is re-enforced by Kamini's mixed education: the informal part made up from the local lore and the family sagas and the formal one provided in Christian convent schools. But Kamini is so preoccupied with coming to terms with her past that she does not yet notice that the culture of

her mother country and that of her country of settlement are both hybridized (Pirbhai, "To Canada . . ." 391). As she sees it, the argument of her parents about following English ways and securing an English education for their children becomes another buffer zone between the two of them.

From the mother's narrative it appears that following the age-old traditions prescribing roles for women, her family gave her away in an arranged marriage disregarding her excellent abilities and ambitions to become a doctor. After her marriage, Saroja lives wherever her husband is transferred by the railways and has to set up a new home again and again. The home is constantly shifting, so it is not a stable place for her, it does not provide security for her. If anything, she feels trapped in it as in a cage since she has no choice but to follow her husband even as she can never accompany him on his daily journeys doing his job. Ironically, as a result, she is also dehomed.

Due to these shifts, she also has problems focusing her memories and like Kamini, she chooses to organize them around houses she and her family occupied, without following a strictly chronological order. The lack of such an order and the blending of stories into one another can again be related to the traditional, often circular structure of Indian orature permitting diversions as Ashcroft et al. explain it when describing the similarly non-linear structure of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (181). Saroja is quite aware of the difficulties involved in organizing her experience when she openly addresses the problem in a postmodern self-reflexive mode:

what is one to do with a life like mine, scrawled all over the country, little trails here and there, moving, moving all the time, and never in one fixed direction? . . . It is as if I live within a series of dreams. As long as the dream holds I know where I am. I try to fix myself in one place, a single context. Perhaps, in my childhood home, . . . (155-6).

Consequently, loneliness and rootlessness are not the sources of her daughter's anxiety exclusively but hers as well deriving from her existence as a "Railway memsahib" (Badami 155) being on the move all the time. She also lives an isolated life but in her case the main reason for her sense of abandonment and loneliness is her dysfunctional marriage, the silence that separates her from her husband. No matter how much she talks, there is no meaningful communication between them; they live according to the duties allotted to them by social conventions. She, too, comes to terms with her past eventually when she remorsefully admits:

A person grows on you like an ingrown nail. You keep cutting and filing and pulling it out, but the nail just grows back. Then you get used to the wretched thing, you learn to ignore and even become fond of it. Same with Dadda. His quiet became part of my noise. If he had not been so silent would I have babbled on? Can you clap with one hand? Which means that I cannot put the entire blame for our life on him. (Badami 243)

The novel ends with both narrator-protagonists' defiant self-assertion. After her husband's death and children's departure to live their own life in the States and in Canada respectively, Saroja sets out to travel by train, to do what her husband did and denied his wife. Interestingly, when she abandons her home and is constantly on the move, it is then that she gains agency because it is done of her own volition. While travelling and fulfilling a lifelong dream of hers, Saroja deliberately violates a set of rules established by her husband for such occasions. Her loneliness is also dispelled, even if temporarily, as she tells her life-story to an attentive audience of women. Here storytelling once again appears as a means to assert one's identity. She also admits that although it is painful for her to live without her daughters, they have to leave and make their own lives and "build [their] own memories" (Badami263). This is

the impulse that wins out eventually in spite of Saroja's occasional advice for Kamini to get married, inadvertently repeating her own mother's ideas as Hagar Shipley does in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (13) when she encourages her sons with words her father used, the father she had a troubled relationship with.

Without admitting it, Kamini turns out to be just as sharp-tongued and obstinate as her mother has always been, hence the title of the novel: "In my younger days, when I was a Railway wife, the servants called me Tamarind Mem for my acid tongue" (Badami 260), as Saroja remarks. Kamini becomes the one who fulfils her mother's dream to study, to become a scientist, a wish Saroja was denied by her family because of her gender. However, these instances of self-assertion occur when Saroja is at the end of her life, while Kamini can, perhaps, close a chapter of her life and open up new possibilities not only because she is in a different country but also because time has passed and the choices of this new generation of women have multiplied. Travelling within one's own country or outside its borders thus becomes a liberating experience for both women. How successful it will become for Kamini is left undecided, though. In this novel where two lives and two countries are juxtaposed, instead of discovering irreconcilable binaries, the reader is surprised to find striking similarities, which make *Tamarind Mem* into a representative work of our increasingly transnational era.

Chapter 6: Transnational Migrants in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *English Lessons and Other Stories*

The first novel discussed in this dissertation was written by a diasporic woman writer of Sikh descent, Ravinder Randhawa, who has made England her adopted home. To come full circle, the last volume to be explored here is a collection of fifteen short stories also written by a female author of Sikh ancestry but, in her case, the route of migration was somewhat more complicated and included multiple relocations as has been explained in the Introduction. The three countries Baldwin is related to are Canada, India and the United States: she was born in Montreal but grew up in India and finally settled in the United States, never relinquishing her Canadian citizenship. As a South Asian returnee to Canada in the 1990s, she belongs to a more recent wave of South Asian immigrants together with Anita Rau Badami, who settled down in Canada in the same decade.

This group of more recent arrivals in North America from the Indian subcontinent in “the gold rush” period of immigration reached Canada in the decades starting with the 1960s as Parameswaran observes (qtd. in McGifford x). The community of newcomers to which people like Badami and Baldwin belong represents a more diverse and better educated segment of South Asians than those who arrived earlier such as the Sikhs reaching Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Those Punjabi Sikhs coming with the first wave of South Asian immigration mostly worked in the lumber industry in British Columbia. It is the new group of South Asian immigrants of the third wave mentioned in Chapter 4 that is responsible for the remarkable literary output of the diaspora in recent decades, an achievement acknowledged by various prizes awarded to their writers (McGifford x).⁴

⁴ For example, Rohinton Mistry received the Governor-General's Award for English-language fiction in 1991 as mentioned earlier, and Michael Ondaatje was awarded the same prize a year later and subsequently in

A large number of the South Asian immigrants still live in British Columbia, whose majority is of the Sikh ethnicity; it is the Sikhs who form the largest South Asian ethnic group in the whole of Canada today (“Sikhism”). But since the early 1960s South Asians have settled down in various urban centres in Ontario, Alberta and Québec, too, where they have also found occupation in different businesses. After arriving in Canada in larger numbers and establishing themselves in more settled and more prosperous conditions, South Asians made a noticeable impact on the cultural and political life of the country as well.

Although South Asians were finally given the vote and were allowed to participate in politics in Canada in 1947, it was only in the 1980s that the first South Asian was elected to a legislature in Canada making the ethnic group more influential in politics as well. (“A Timeline”) As it may have been expected, it happened in British Columbia where the largest number of Sikhs resided. In the following years, South Asians were chosen to be members of provincial parliaments and eventually there were some who also entered the federal Parliament in Ottawa or became cabinet ministers. The current cabinet of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also includes Sikhs among its members even after its reshuffle in the summer of 2018. The election of Jagmeet Singh, a lawyer of South Asian background, who also happens to be a Sikh, to be leader of a federal party, the New Democratic Party signalled another great success for South Asians in October 2017. This was the first time in Canadian politics that someone from a visible minority group had become the leader of a federal party on a permanent basis. It happened five years after he was recognized by the World Sikh

2000 and 2007 again. Rohinton Mistry received the Giller Prize, a more recent but equally prestigious literary award, in 1995 as well, while M.G. Vassanji was awarded the prize twice and Ondaatje received it 2000, too. It is these “older male writers of international acclaim” whose works are anthologized most frequently as noted by Chakraborty and Field (12). That is why it is desirable to balance the view of South Asian Canadian literature in this dissertation with the inclusion of works by younger female authors as well such as Anita Rau Badami, the recipient of the Marian Engel Award, a recognition made especially valuable by the fact that its recipient is chosen by fellow writers, for her body of work, and Shauna Singh Baldwin, who was awarded the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the Canada/Caribbean region in recognition of the outstanding qualities of her first novel, *What the Body Remembers* in 2000, while her next novel, *The Tiger Claw* was shortlisted for the Giller Prize in 2004.

Organization of Canada for being the first turbaned Sikh Member of the Provincial Parliament in Ontario. As the leader of the New Democratic Party, he has the chance to challenge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in the next federal elections. His win would be a truly historical event in the country.

It was in the same decade of the 1980s when South Asians started to make their appearance in Canadian politics with greater effect that their literary output became more noticeable as well. In 1981, a group of young university graduates, recent arrivals in Canada themselves, started the literary journal *The Toronto South Asian Review* to help new writers from minority cultures find an audience. A few years later the journal broadened its scope and was renamed *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* to indicate this shift in focus towards diversification. Explaining further reasons for this change, Mukherjee calls attention to the realization that “South Asian Canadian writers do not see themselves as members of a self-identified community” (31), so the new title of the journal expresses a sense of greater inclusion without using ethnic labels or creating cultural barriers. The publishing house TSAR Publications was also an offshoot of the journal bringing out its first volumes in 1985. Now the publisher operates under the name Mawenzi House named after the second tallest peak of the Kilimanjaro, to continue the mission of publishing multicultural works, especially those that are related to Asia or Africa (“Mawenzi House”).

South Asian Canadians brought out their first joint publication as an ethnic community in English in 1985. As Arun Mukherjee notes, it was a collection of essays called *A Meeting of Streams* that represented the diaspora on its own in a single volume (24). This was to be followed by *The Geography of Voice*, a literary anthology, in 1992, *Shakti's Words: South Asian Canadian Women's Poetry* a year later (1993), and several other volumes including *The Whistling Thorn: South Asian Canadian Fiction* (1994), *Sons Must Die and Other Plays* (1998), as well as *Her Mother's Ashes*, the third book in a series of writings by South Asian

women in Canada and the United States (2009). Several of these volumes were published by the Toronto-based TSAR publishing house mentioned above.

If works by individual authors in South Asian languages such as Punjabi and Urdu are also taken into account, the beginnings of South Asian diasporic literature in Canada can be traced back to the time when the first South Asians arrived in Vancouver in the early years of the twentieth century (Chakraborty and Field 14). As these writings “are rarely translated and circulate almost exclusively within specific linguistic groups” (Chakraborty and Field 14), they are understandably lesser known than their English language counterparts that started appearing in Canada after the Second World War. South Asian poetry in English published in journals has a history dating back to the late 1950s. Short story collections followed in the 1960s to be succeeded by the first South Asian novels published in English in Canada in the 1970s including works by such authors as Bharati Mukherjee and Harold Sonny Ladoo. Uma Parameswaran, who has been quoted in this dissertation as a critic so far, must also be credited as the author of the first South Asian plays to be written and performed in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s (Chakraborty and Field 15).

However, anthologies based on a regional grouping of their authors appear more and more rarely these days, and the label South Asian is barely applied in the titles any more, as it has become regarded by some as “a reductive, constrictive, and false categorization” inadequate to reflect the diversity it is supposed to cover (Dunlop 117). Some diasporic authors who still embrace the label South Asian do it for a particular reason: for example, playwright Sheila James regards it as a deliberate “political act in a white-dominated profession” (qtd. in Chakraborty and Field 21).

The most recent collections published by Mawenzi House illustrate the former trend outlined above where the emphasis is on greater inclusion and the erasure of ethnic categories. *Looking Back, Moving Forward*, an anthology of short creative pieces and essays addressing

the immigrant experience in their different ways was published in November 2018. Its contributors include authors from a great variety of places such as Egypt, Argentina, Chile, Syria, Pakistan, India, Somalia, Ethiopia, Germany, China, Mexico, the Philippines, and Nepal (“Looking Back, Moving Forward”). The most recent anthology of criticism published by Mawenzi House in 2017 bears the title *Confluences 2: Essays on the New Canadian Literature*. In this almost all-inclusive title the word Canadian is in the focus, which, instead of identifying ethnicity, foregrounds nationality. On the other hand, what is meant by new writing is specified in the Preface: it is writing “that draws its inspiration, in some form, from the histories, cultures, traditions, and experiences of the countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Near East, and the Caribbean – i.e. areas considered historically outside the purview of the ‘Western’” (Aziz 1). In the Canadian literary context, western seems to coincide with the canonical, so it is this group of works with which the writing introduced in these anthologies is contrasted, but no ethnic label is used.

This approach to anthologizing which aims to eliminate ethnic boundaries but not ethnic specificities follows in the footsteps of multicultural anthologies of earlier times exemplified by *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* edited by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond in 1991 or *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* edited by Smaro Kamboureli in 1996. These volumes work against the separation of ethnic writings from each other while keeping a distance from mainstream literature meaning works by authors of white Anglo-Saxon ancestry. Even so, as Smaro Kamboureli remarks, Hutcheon’ and Richmond’s volume “was criticized for, among other things, being too close to the mainstream canon” (165) because it includes authors like Mordecai Richler or Josef Skvorecky, male writers of East European descent. On the other hand, as the subtitles include the word multicultural in both cases, it seems to be used as a synonym of ethnic in contrast with white, the ethnicity perceived as dominant, whether of Anglo-Saxon descent or

otherwise. In this way, the perceptions underlying the editorial policies of these newer anthologies exemplify the new binary created by multiculturalism, as mentioned by Donna Bennett earlier. But because attention is paid to the ethnic differences and an attempt is made to offer the opportunity of parallel readings and dialogues between the texts, anthologies like these appear to realize in practice what Uma Parameswaran was hoping for at the dawn of an officially multicultural Canada when she emphasized the need for the recognition “that pockets of distinctive language groups are not ghetto settlements but centres of living and equal cultures” (79). The earlier anthologies that highlighted the regional origin seem to comply with Bruce King’s observation that early immigrant writing tends to focus on self-assertion, part of which is the emphasis on the distinct features of the various ethnicities (6). What Mariam Pirbhai deems lacking where it comes to the production and reception of South Asian Canadian literature in recent times is an informed critical appreciation of such writing. She has this to say in this connection:

while South Asian Canadian literature has been filtered through specialized readings of authors and texts, it has not been the object of sustained critical attention, either as a category of study or as a growing body of writing, in the post-millennium period. This calls attention to the discontinuities that likely inform our current discussions, and warrants a retrospective reading of this earlier period of criticism if, that is, we are to move forward in more productive ways. (9)

According to Chakraborty and Field, such scholarly work should foster greater integration of the South Asian diaspora, its history and literature into the Canadian host culture (22). There is implied criticism here of the insistence on the earlier, widely used metaphor of Canada as a mosaic country, which in effect appears to prohibit not only polybridity but hybridity in any

degree. They observe and support the following recent changes with great sympathy: “Increasingly rejecting hyphenated subjectivities, South Asian Canadian artists are claiming positions that reflect their interactions, intersections, and conflicts across diverse racial groups, religions, sexualities, abilities, classes, genders, nations, and generations” (23). But such endeavours should not only come from the South Asian diaspora; similar attempts at integrating the history and culture of minority groups should also be made by the dominant society as well.

After tracing the arrival of South Asians in Canada and the ways in which they have contributed to the political, cultural and literary life of their country of adoption, two traumatic events from their history need to be examined which are regarded as instances of exclusion often deliberately omitted from the official narrative of Canadian history. These two events are the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914 and the bombing of Air India flight 182 in 1985, which, due to their lasting influence and incomplete resolution, present the relationship between South Asians and the dominant society as highly problematic even today. According to Mariam Pirbhai, the *Komagata Maru* incident functions significantly as “a diasporic metanarrative [articulating] the struggles, hopes, and aspirations common to multigenerational communities of South Asian Canadians” (Pirbhai, “Introduction” 7).

The *Komagata Maru* was a Japanese steamship that transported 376 passengers of South Asian origin aiming to immigrate to Canada. As they had the status of British subjects coming from the Raj, they should have been granted entry to Canada, which was a Dominion then, as a matter of course. However, the Canadian government had introduced the Continuous Journey Regulation, imposing requirements with which these passengers were unable to comply as an uninterrupted voyage from India to Canada was almost impossible at the time. So the ship was detained off the shores of Vancouver for two months, during which time “the passengers aboard the ship were threatened at gunpoint and forced to leave

Canadian shores” (Somani 79). In the end, all the passengers except 21 were denied their rights and freedom and had no choice but to return to India. This regulation made it possible to keep Canada white by allowing “the government to restrict both Indian and Japanese immigration without specifying exclusion on the basis of race, nationality or ethnic origins” (“Continuous Journey”). Historian Peter Ward recalls the figure of H.H. Stevens, a Conservative Member of Parliament and a leading anti-Oriental spokesman, who “voiced the central concern of west coast nativists, the belief that unassimilable Asian immigrants threatened [British Columbia’s] cultural homogeneity” (qtd. in Somani 88).

Another traumatic and shocking incident of racial injustice involves the terrorist attack on Air India flight 182, in which all 329 passengers, 280 of whom were Canadian citizens, mostly of South Asian descent, lost their lives off the coast of Ireland in 1985. Not surprisingly, it is viewed as a “symbol of betrayal by the state” (Pirbhai, “Introduction” 17) in the first novel focussing on this tragedy since the Canadian government stalled the investigation for a long time as it did not consider it to be a Canadian issue. The Canadian authorities involved simply ignored the fact that the flight had departed from Toronto carrying mainly Canadian passengers, and that the conspiracy was carried out by Sikh extremists living in British Columbia. Responsibility for the investigation was handed over to India on the grounds that the bomb explosion happened on an Indian flight and was related to the rising Sikh separatist movement, which had also caused the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh body guards in 1984. This assassination happened in retaliation for the storming of the Golden Temple ordered by Gandhi to crack down on Sikh militancy in 1984. “The temple is not only the highest seat of religious and temporal authority for the Sikhs (analogous to the significance of St Peter’s for Catholics) it also was the symbolic centre of a world without boundaries.”(Cohen 117) So obviously it enraged the Sikhs, who were further hunted down

after the assassination. “Some 2,000 Sikhs were killed in communal riots and Sikhs responded by terrorism and violence, adding several thousand more to the casualties”. (Cohen 117)

Since then official apologies have been made by Canada for both discriminatory acts; instead of closing off the past, Stephen Harper’s 2008 apology “opened up a space for minorities to demand more adequate statements, for compensation, and ultimately for a nation that remembers” (Somani 13). As Sikhs were the majority among the victims in both cases, these two tragic incidents play an especially crucial role in how Sikhs situate themselves in their relationship to mainstream Canadian society. Alia Somani notes that there has been a proliferation of texts about these tragedies in recent years, due to which they are in the public consciousness now and also “seep into the national imaginary” (75). She also argues that “a conscious and deliberate remembering of the nation’s forgotten past can serve strategically to alter the composition and text of the Canadian nation, to re-member [sic] it, and in so doing ultimately to transform it into a more heterogeneous space” (76).

Some of the historical events recounted make their appearance in Baldwin’s short narratives collected in a volume titled *English Lessons and Other Stories*. The protagonists, like the author herself, are of Sikh background; some of them, similarly to Baldwin, travel back and forth between North America and the Indian subcontinent, but there are others who are only presented in their new country, while some of the stories focus on “curiously reversed migrations back to a home place by a Westernized protagonist” (Howells, “Not Belonging, but Longing” 1). Therefore, the Sikh identity of her protagonists is seen in collision with either the North American culture at large or the culture of her Muslim or Hindu characters. The opening stories in Baldwin’s collection address the difficulties involved in the process of acculturation either as a family member leaves home and relatives behind for school or for work abroad to return home as a completely altered person, or as Sikh immigrants in North America experience the demands made on them by both or either of their

cultures, the inherited and the acquired ones. The outcome of these negotiations is rather uncertain when not explicitly disastrous.

This outcome is often suggested by issues related to clothing, especially the turban worn by men. Wearing a turban is a religious obligation for Sikh men because their faith requires them not to shave their beard and not to cut their hair. As their hair also has to be kept clean, they wear their turbans to cover their hair. Thus the turban of a Sikh man becomes an object metonymically signifying his religious and ethnic identity. This conspicuous piece of clothing has been the subject of much debate and controversy in Canada regarding the extent to which the religious prescription for Sikh men to wear a turban can be accommodated by Canadian society when they fulfill public roles during work, for example. As Tobias Döring emphasizes, when “considering processes of migrancy and acculturation [it is noticeable how] multiple affiliations and cultural contestations operate through clothing” (255). bell hooks [sic] claims that clothes can function politically as she believes there is a connection between people’s style of clothing and subversion, which explains why she is interested in “the way the dominated, exploited people use style to express resistance and/or conformity” (323). Seen in this context, it is not surprising that the turban features prominently in seven out of Shauna Singh Baldwin’s fifteen stories in the collection to be discussed.

In a very few instances in Baldwin’s stories, the turban, however, is simply a piece of clothing. It is described in a realistic manner in “Nothing Must Spoil this Visit” where we are told in a neutral tone that “Kamal gave a final tug at the last spiral of his partridge-coloured turban, clumped down the stairs and folded himself into Papaji’s Fiat” (Baldwin 109). In this description of a young man dressing up before leaving home, the turban could easily be substituted by a scarf or mittens to give a similar description of how people get ready to leave home on a winter morning in other parts of the world. But this quotation exemplifies the

exception rather than the rule of how the author uses the turban symbolically loading it with additional meanings. In the first two stories of the volume, the turban unequivocally refers to the characters' ethnic identity. It is not by chance, either, that there are more stories in the first part of the collection where the turban plays an important role in identifying the characters as Sikhs because this gives an opportunity for the writer to establish what religious and ethno-cultural background her main characters come from, whose concerns she foregrounds in her writing.

In the first story of the collection entitled "Rawalpindi 1919", a mother's thoughts are presented in the first person while she is preparing a meal for her family in her home located in the city mentioned in the title, on the territory of the British Raj at the time, now being part of Pakistan. She reflects upon her two sons, the younger of whom is setting off for "the white people's country, to learn from their gurus in their dark and cloudy cities" (Baldwin 9). She imagines the changes to take place in him: "He would look thinner after three years. ... They would expect him to tie his beard, his long dark beard, up under his chin. She would be sure he had enough turbans to last two months on the boat and three years in England. Some silk ones--oh, the brightest colours--so the Angrez would know he came from a bold Sikh clan" (Baldwin 10). While she emphasizes the pride taken in their culture, she is ready to accommodate these future alterations and tells her husband in a matter-of-fact style in the closing lines: "You will need to buy chairs for this house when he returns ... And we will need plates" (Baldwin 11) because, as she has explained earlier, "Angrez don't use steel thalis. They use white plates. ... He [their younger son] will have to learn that" (Baldwin 11).

The process of assimilation is not always as smooth and peaceful as the words of the narrator in "Rawalpindi 1919" imply, for the simple reason that the new arrivals' adjustment to the prevailing conditions of the host country is not always merely a matter of acquiring some quaint but innocent new habits but require the readjustment of a whole mind-set. At

times when more profound transformations are involved, the changes appear to threaten the very essence of the identity of the Sikh immigrants Baldwin portrays. In “Montreal 1962”, the second story of the collection, an unnamed woman, a wife, washes her husband’s turbans and is entranced by the colours of the silk they are made of, by the noble fabric’s splendour and soft texture. The process of washing and drying the turbans arouses all the tender feelings for her husband, bringing to mind the previous generations of women doing the same for their husbands, ancestral traditions passed down from one member of her family to another, in order to help their men “face the world proud” (Baldwin 14). Her favourite turban, the red one, reminds her of “the sainted blood of all the Sikh martyrs” (Baldwin 15) as well. In this instance, the private world of the woman intersects with the public history of her community, as the two worlds are connected with the references to the turban. Such age-old traditions and the fond associations attendant on them are wholly alien to the humdrum, pragmatic world of the dominant host society, and the emotional mismatch has conflict-ridden consequences.

When an object has so many and so deep-rooted meanings, it is not surprising that the protagonist becomes emboldened in her own gentle way and decides to protect her husband from giving up his identity by obeying his prospective Canadian employers, who are only willing to offer him a job, a means to make a life for themselves in Canada, on condition he takes off his turban, cuts his hair and conforms to the rules of the new country. She sharply contrasts the promises that lured them to Canada with the reality they find upon their arrival: based on her husband’s qualifications, they were to have opportunities and freedom; instead, now they feel trapped because they are expected to “be reborn white-skinned--and [he must be] clean-shaven to show it--to survive” (Baldwin 13). The final suggestion is that doing so would be too high a price, which leaves the reader with a sense of utter hopelessness, the realisation of a painful absence of possible reconciliation between the two cultures.

The impression thus created is counterbalanced by valiant defiance on the part of the female narrator, the wife. She is willing to sacrifice herself rather than her husband's pride by leaving the home, the South Asian tradition for women to be sequestered in, and take a job for herself so that "One day [their] children [would] say, 'My father came to this country with very little but his turban and my mother learned to work because no one would hire him'" (Baldwin 16). Arguably, this is "an engagement 'in a hybridization of the Canadian custom of going out to work' for it is not done to give *her* more freedom but 'to preserve the *izzat* [dignity] of her husband'" (Kuortti 123). The concluding sentence of the story is a telling example of the protagonist's subversive efforts in the face of ethnic discrimination: "Then we will have taught Canadians what it takes to wear a turban" (Baldwin 16). It is important to note, though, that this story is dated 1962 because rules in Canada have changed since then. Virtually unconditional religious tolerance has been embraced in the country and religious freedom is guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms enacted in 1982.

But wearing a turban is not always a choice. When, in the story called "The Insult", the parents of the main character, already living in Chicago look for a suitable groom for their daughter so that they can arrange her marriage, they find a "good Sikh fellow" in Delhi, who, however, does not own a turban. The permanent absence of the appropriate headgear from this otherwise worthy young Sikh man is explained to be the result of remembered traumatic historical events unfolding at the time when Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards in 1984:

He'd been driving a jeep home from college on that day in 1984 when every Hindu was licensed to kill a Sikh, and it was lucky for him that they did no more than pull him from that wobbly raft and, with his six yards of saffron billowing on the black potholed road, pull down his knot of sleek, long, curly black hair and take a scissor to

it. My father says he must have fought like a tiger as the mob plucked out his beard; I have never asked my husband to tell me why he has no need to shave. (Baldwin 145)

Racial prejudice flares up in less violent situations in India as well, and Sikhs can be its target very easily because they can be spotted with no difficulty due to their turban in Canada as well as India. That is how the narrator's brother in "Family Ties" falls victim to Hindu boys when sent to boarding school: he is teased about his turban and, because he has long hair, he is forced to dress like a woman and "parade before an audience" (Baldwin 27). Inder, the brother can never become his old self again and finds Sikh beliefs and teachings useless in the face of adversity. He starts to smoke in spite of the religious injunction, takes drugs and, in the end, becomes a mentally disturbed addict.

A major theme in the collection is the conflict between a modern, western way of life and a life, eastern-style, determined by traditions. In the examples introduced above in which traditions signified by wearing a turban play an important role, regardless of any short-term practical disadvantages that they may be responsible for, ethnic and religious traditions are shown ultimately to aid immigrants in preserving their identity, surviving as human beings in the liminal space of the strange land, caught between the familiar and the unfamiliar. However, the first example showed a more flexible, conformist attitude allowing modifications and compromises to be made, which facilitate eventual hybridization first of the identity of the young man and then his home in India. The same holds true, to some extent, for the story called "Dropadi Ma", which narrates the preparations in India for an arranged marriage, in which the groom involved has just returned home for the occasion after having lived in Montreal for a longer stretch of time. A conflict is generated by his Western-style refusal to marry a girl without first knowing her. However, he agrees to follow the age-old rules of behaviour prescribed by his ancestral culture when, talking to one of his elders, his

more understanding nanny, he receives her blessings with a turbaned head. The comment of the young, third person narrator on this incident is worth noting here: “I wondered if they ask a blessing from their elders in Canada, for he had not forgotten how” (Baldwin 19). Similarly to Kersi in Mistry’s story “Lend Me Your Light”, Baldwin’s transnational protagonist experiences alienation from his homeland after living in Canada and leaves his homeland rebelling against its traditions in the form of an arranged marriage. His movement between the two countries and their respective cultures together with his emerging hybrid identity is a source of conflict rather than a cause for celebration.

In “Toronto 1984”, the life of the Sikh diasporans is also fraught with conflicts resulting from cultural differences. What therefore emerges from the story is a mixed view of Canadian society, which can be tolerant and racist at the same time. On the one hand, the younger narrator called Piya is allowed to stay on at her job in spite of offending her employer by refusing to stand up and drink a toast to Elizabeth II, of whom she critically thinks as “the British Queen, the symbol of the empire my grandfathers fought against for independence, the one whose line had sent my grandfathers to prison. I would not stand” (Baldwin 63). On the other hand, afterwards Piya is referred to as a “Paki” half-jokingly by her boss, who seems to be unaware of the deeply offensive nature of the word and his ignorance that the subcontinent is not wholly populated by Pakistani people. Piya swallows her anger at the racist remark and fights back in the name of the whole subcontinent by proving to be an efficient employee. According to Giri and Kumar, in Piya’s solidarity with all the people of the subcontinent, “we see the emergence of a distinct South Asian diasporic identity alongside the fraught axis of a colonialism-engendered racial divide” (14).

Piya’s family, like the one presented in “Dropadi Ma” also insists on following inherited traditions and prepares an arranged marriage for her. From this she is saved by another similarly catastrophic event, the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh

bodyguards in retaliation for her ordering an attack on the Golden Temple, a sacred location for all Sikhs in Amritsar, resulting in the deaths of eighty soldiers and some five hundred civilians in 1984. The family visit taking Piya from Toronto to India is thus postponed and not without reason: from documents it is known that a wholesale massacre of Sikhs followed in Delhi and some other major cities in the north of the subcontinent. Thus, her diasporic present is still heavily influenced by events in the ancestral home.

It is not the only traumatic event from the history of India proper which haunts the pages of the collection. The Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan at the time of the region gaining independence on 15 August 1947 is also evoked in the story “Family Ties”. This is not surprising since the province of Punjab, home to a significant Sikh population, was divided between the two countries at that time. Partition went together with a large-scale movement of population involving more than ten million people. As the new Indian and Pakistani governments were absolutely unprepared to handle the situation, they had no control over the erupting violence that resulted in the slaughter of about 500,000 people. It is implied in the story that the father’s sister was taken advantage of and raped by Muslims; she became pregnant and gave birth to an illegitimate child. The unwanted birth subsequently leads to her being rejected by the family due to a false sense of pride and shame at the same time, ultimately causing her madness.

Cultural differences survive spatial dislocation as well when, in the eponymous short story, Simran travels to the US to study and meets a fellow student of Pakistani Muslim background, who immediately falls in love with her. The two of them never really get intimate in spite of Mirza’s attempts, which, however, always stop short of a proposal of marriage, something he still regards as impossible between a Muslim and a Sikh. His insistent phone calls after Simran’s return home destroy her chances of ever returning to the place of

study abroad as her parents are abhorred by their mistaken speculations about their daughter's affair with a believer in the Koran.

A complicated view of related affairs is offered in "Nothing Must Spoil This Visit" when a Sikh young man called Arvind, now married to a second-generation Hungarian-Canadian woman, re-visits his family at his birthplace in India with her. The contrast between the active, talkative and energetic Janet and her Sikh counterpart Chaya becomes obvious early on in the story, though the reasons for Chaya's shyness, passivity and hostility towards Janet are only revealed later. As it turns out Chaya, now married to Arvind's brother, was once engaged to Arvind as a preliminary to an arranged marriage, which eventually fell through for two reasons. First, Arvind left for Canada; second, she compromised herself with Arvind's brother and had no other choice but to marry him. Yet, at the end we learn that a child, so important in all the families presented in the collection, will be forever denied to Janet and Arvind because of his childhood illness, while Chaya has already fulfilled this role in her life. Values clash subtly and choices are hard to make in this case. Tensions are expressed subtly throughout the story as in Chaya's following free indirect speech:

[Chaya] was always slow. It really didn't matter – she came from good blood and she had given [Kamal] a son. What more was there? At least she wasn't like Janet, brash and talkative, asking questions as though she had a right to the answers.

What did Arvind see in Janet? A woman who appeared not to need a man. These foreign women, . . . look at their movies – full of gaunt red-lipped women thrusting their come-hither pelvises at every eye. No sweetness, no kindness, no softness.

A Hungarian reader also begins to wonder why Baldwin has chosen a Hungarian immigrant for the Sikh young man Arvind's wife. One explanation might be the plausibility of such a situation: the Hungarian Janet is not quite part of mainstream Canadian society, which makes her available for this kind of inter-racial marriage, but coming from a European background she is attractive enough for the young man due to her generic European background associating her with the exotic, in this case Occidental, Other in his eyes.

Baldwin's stories can also be read as illustrations of the "feminization of diasporic narrative" (Kuortti 125) due to the foregrounding of the lives of women. It is especially so in the title story "English Lessons", in which the wife Kanwaljit's process of adaptation to North America goes hand in hand with the growth of her self-assertion. She does not only change her name to Kelly to fit in but she also challenges her husband by asking her English teacher to assist her in finding out about more opportunities of the new land than just learning the language. With this, she deliberately violates her husband's instruction given to the teacher earlier: "I will not like it if you teach her more than I know" (Baldwin 133). From stories like this Preeti Shirodkar concludes that Baldwin's writing "explores rebellion by women in varied forms" (213).

The theme of female self-liberation through rebellion is further explored in the collection's final story "Devika", which delineates the progress of the eponym from a frightened woman caged in their flat in Toronto to one with her own will and determination. This process, however, takes place in an ominous atmosphere reminiscent of the conditions in which the life of Antoinette Cosway, later known as Bertha Mason, unfolds in Jean Rhys's postcolonial classic, *Wide Sargasso Sea* or the way Mary Turner reaches any degree of freedom in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. All three women become delusional and suffer a mental breakdown as they attempt to escape their confinement.

The haunting memories of catastrophic historical events in the past, the difficulties of adapting to a new culture while also preserving the old-country heritage, the importance attached to one's loyalty or lack of loyalty to the family, and women's double marginalization resulting from racial and gender oppression are the most striking features of the volume. As a woman writer, Baldwin also finds it significant to explore these issues from the viewpoint of women, thus interpreting them from a peculiar, gendered angle presenting them in a new light. The reader discovers in practice what the poet-critic Rishma Dunlop claims about diasporic writing when calling it "a push against the existing order of things, speech that makes possible new understandings of human differences, writing against the grain of history" (116) in an attempt to challenge and dismantle borders.

Conclusion

Emerging from the above investigation into the various representations of problems of identity in South Asian diasporic writing is the overall impression that in spite of sharing the same thematic preoccupations and regional background and having published their volumes under scrutiny in this dissertation in the same ten-year period, the authors of the various texts containing such representations exemplify a multiplicity of attitudes and approaches using widely divergent narrative gambits and discursive strategies. As a counter-reaction of sorts to such diversity there have been attempts made by critics such as Sarah Upstone to reduce the bewildering heterogeneity of the phenomenon to some semblance of unity by classifying the authors in question as writers working within “a definitive genre of British [or Canadian] Asian writing”, as the scholar posits in her Introduction (1). Susheila Nasta also confirms that such a grouping may “force literary links between a number of different literary voices who have shared a diasporic history and colonial relationship with Britain” (6). However, to define all that multifarious writing as one singular category would be a gross reduction, argues Upstone herself in her Conclusion to the same collection referred to above (209). Nasta also cautions against bonding “together into a tightly woven ‘genre’ or ‘style’” the broad range of novels published by South Asian authors in Britain in the post-1945 period (7).

These writers all deal with their burden of representation, to use Kobena Mercer’s phrase echoing the oft-cited title of Kipling’s notorious poem “The White Man’s Burden”, in order to write meaningfully and in compellingly individual ways about South Asians from an Asian perspective in their own different ways. Reservations about the legitimacy of using such a blanket term as South Asian writing are completely understandable since “to reduce writers to the role of representatives who are expected to delegate, or speak on behalf of a particular community, is to curb their artistic freedom” (“New Ethnicities, the Novel, . . .”

102) argues James Procter relying on statements made by Zadie Smith to a similar effect. Thinking along the lines of Stuart Hall's essay "New Ethnicities", Procter explores the works of authors whom he identifies as belonging to either Hall's first moment of representation, writing in a mimetic mode and offering positive images of Black people, or the second moment, producing more discursive literature engaging all sorts of differences including those related to "ethnicity, gender, generation, and sexuality" with greater readiness in the lives of ethnic groups formerly brought together under the umbrella term Black (Procter, "New Ethnicities, the Novel, . . ." 103).

In Procter's view, Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* is a prominent example of the second moment because "Rushdie prefers metaphors of ongoing metamorphosis; mobile notions of becoming instead of established notions of being" ("New Ethnicities, the Novel, . . ." p 107). He also draws attention to the fact that Rushdie's narrative is a self-conscious artifice, in which identity is staged rather than represented as something inherently authentic or essential (Procter, "New Ethnicities, the Novel, . . ." 108-109). It can be argued that Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* also belongs to the second moment of representation for exactly the same reasons of identity being represented as an unfolding process rather than a static given.

Both Rushdie's and Randhawa's novels in question abound in instances of transformation, literal as well as metaphorical, testing the limits and possibilities of character metamorphosis. The final outcome is far from being unequivocal, which leads to indeterminacy in both novels regarding the issue of hybridity, the result of transformation, although hybridity is presented in a number of different forms in the two novels. At the same time, both novels also depict the effects of the empire within Britain on British society. Special attention is given to London, where the co-habitation of people of diverse ethnicities with the English population leads to significant changes of transculturation not only for the

more recent arrivals influenced by the culture of the host land but for the indigenous, “white” English population as well, which undergoes colonization in reverse, as they are also transformed in important ways in their contacts with the once colonized minority. It was a completely new experience for the dominant society in Britain, which started to be recognized only after immigration from the former colonies occurred on a larger scale after the Second World War. This new experience made it possible for both Randhawa and Rushdie to re-write the metropolis in their respective novels.

However, the two authors also diverge in significant ways due to which they are often considered to be representatives of successive and distinct British Asian generations. As it has been mentioned in Chapter 3, Rushdie prefers the designation migrant, a term implying spatial mobility and existential indeterminacy in reference to his and his characters’ self-positioning and sensibility, which critics tend to agree with. It might be due to this stance that Rushdie presents his two main characters Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta not only as outsiders in British society but as figures who are also at a distance from their own ethnic communities, so much so that they even make occasionally quite harshly critical remarks about them. Gibreel’s schizophrenia and eventual suicide may also be related to this double alienation, while Saladin’s story appears to have a happy ending as he returns to India, although it is rather uncertain if he will remain there for the rest of his life. Søren Frank argues that the novel is migratory in its form, too, because of its “heterogeneity . . . , its persistent stepping across lines of genre, of story, of dream and reality, of language, of religion, of nationality, and so forth” (169). The formal and the thematic qualities of Rushdie’s novel are thus combined to reinforce the overall impression of objects, persons, and conditions in a constant state of transformation.

Randhawa, on the other hand, seems to belong to what can be termed an established minority within a given country, which in her case is the South Asian community in Britain.

Ranasinha further expands on the distinction between the different generations of South Asian writers claiming that

First generation migrant narratives of acculturation describe transplanted subjectivities formed during different stages of the colonial and decolonised history of the former colonies. As Anglicised Asians from the former colonies, Rushdie and Naipaul have described the shock on arrival of being perceived as alien in the “mother” country. However, as Rushdie suggests, “At least I know that I really am a foreigner, and don’t feel very English. I don’t define myself by nationality—my passport doesn’t tell me who I am.” For the generation who were born or grew up in Britain [including authors like Randhawa], by contrast, the dominant culture’s attempts to exclude them is felt more acutely and very differently. . . . [they] differ from and enlarge the space created for them by their forerunners by articulating what it is like to feel British, grow up in Britain, and be regarded as foreign. (223)

In this light, it is not surprising that, although a return to India is mentioned sometimes as a possibility for some of the characters in Randhawa’s novel, eventually none of them makes this journey to settle down in India permanently again. They stay in England and as a community become politically very active emphasising the necessity of assuming (and demanding) social responsibility. Like Rushdie’s novel, Randhawa’s is oppositional, too, but it is so in a rather different manner. Rushdie uses his magic realism to provide a powerful satire of Thatcherite Britain in a postmodern fashion; as Ranasinha puts it, “Rushdie was perhaps the first Indian writer in English to combine such a high level of fantasy with social and political critique in fabulist historiography” (210). Randhawa’s social criticism, on the other hand, is expressed in a more directly and soberly representational manner. However,

Randhawa's brand of realism is neither dogmatic nor reductive or simplistic: her characters can avoid sounding didactic due to the writer's clever employment of a non-linear narrative and shifting focalizers.

Due to their discursive strategies, both novels manifest features of what is usually meant by postmodernism as well, which are present in the form of their intertextual references, generic mixing and occasionally dense metafictionality. A self-conscious meditation on the nature of fiction being produced is an important part of either novel, expressed by its artist figure or the narrator, respectively, who ponders exactly the same questions in relation to artistic representation as the ones the narratives, in which they are characters, embody.

In *A Wicked Old Woman*, one of the women called Maya is hired, for being an insider in the South Asian community, to do research among her own people for a TV production provisionally titled *Madness in the Asian Community*. She believes, as do authors belonging to Hall's second moment of representation, that "Surely, someone . . . should be looking at the hidden agony. No one can deny mental problems, illnesses exist in our community, any community. . . . How long can we draw a veil, sweep everything under the carpet? . . . If we have a right to be here [in Britain], don't we have a right to be human, warts and all?" (Randhawa 105) The criticism levelled against her within her ethnic community is the same that was also voiced in real life concerning those who did not provide an exclusively positive image of people of colour. "We don't have to give them [the white producers] something else to ridicule us with," people in the Asian Centre tell Maya (Randhawa 105). But showing "warts and all" is actually what Randhawa herself does, due to which Maya's project can be seen as a sort of foreshortened *mise-en-abyme* of Randhawa's own work. Maya's eventual solution is not to deny the predicament many people in her community face but she decides not to leave the task of its presentation to outsiders, so she tears her notes into pieces.

Eventually, she takes control of the project when she is placed in charge of the production, just as Randhawa is in control of her own material in her novel. That is how both women, actual and fictional, gain agency in their respective creative enterprises.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the fictional author speaking in the first person when appearing in the novel occasionally is more of a self-conscious creator, who makes the reader aware of the fact that what they hold in their hands is an artefact. But in this novel “the metafictional breaches of illusion . . . have been toned down . . . [and] we are now presented with an elusive narrator who refuses to identify himself unequivocally” (Frank 170). As his status remains uncertain the doubts surrounding his identity compound the overall indeterminacy of the novel. Rushdie has the following to say about him indirectly: “If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant’s-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity” (“In Good Faith” 394). The character of such an author-narrator as migrant further emphasizes the importance that Rushdie attributes to the creative power of liminality and hybridity.

The three writers who have made Canada their adopted home write in an environment influenced by a different history and different cultural politics. The collapse of the British Empire and Britain’s loss of its former status as a major player in world politics after the Second World War raised serious questions for the British of how to redefine their entrenched identity, a template against which members of the various diasporas in Britain had to create their own. By contrast, in Canada “a mythology of nation based on territory, origins, race or shared cultural inheritance” (Howells, ““Not Belonging, but Longing”” 1) had been effectively dismantled by the 1980s, if such a clear-cut self-conception had ever existed. Robert Zend, the Hungarian-Canadian poet who arrived in Canada as a refugee after the Hungarian Revolution

of 1956 was crushed, expressed the typical Canadian diasporic situation full of contradictions in the following witty paradox: “Why search for Canadian identity? We found it. Anybody who searches for Canadian identity is a Canadian. Consequently: He who has found his Canadian identity is not a true Canadian” (qtd. in Martin).

In Canada, diversity, plurality, the preservation of minority cultures and heritage languages became part of the national discourse with the rise of officially endorsed multiculturalism from the 1980s onwards. David Staines sums up the changes taking place in the literature of the country parallel to its social transformations in the following words:

We might well describe the history of Canadian literature, especially as we see it in the twentieth century, as the movement from colony to nation to global village, a global village being a nation beyond nationalism, where the nation’s voices are so multifaceted that the distinction between international and national is no longer valid.
(24)

According to James Procter, in Britain, similar tendencies appeared in roughly the same period: “Since the mid-1990s . . . as Hall himself has observed in connection with Blairism, difference has also become incorporated into New Labour’s hegemonic vision, as part of the ‘cool’ in ‘that transient New Labour phenomenon,’ ‘cool Britannia’” (“New Ethnicities, the Novel, . . .” 113). However, the consequences of these tendencies in Britain, in terms of practical political measures, carried incomparably less weight and generated far scarcer political action than they did in Canada.

The emphasis on the preservation of cultural heritage in Canada may be responsible, at least partially, for diasporic authors having settled in that North-American country turning their attention more frequently to the old country and its people than they left behind. The

return journey to the country of birth features in the volumes of all three South Asian Canadian authors discussed in this dissertation. If no such journey takes place in the physical reality described in the books, which is the case in Badami's *Tamarind Mem*, plenty of memories of the ancestral land serve as a means of recreating the subcontinent and its people in the imagination, instead.

These books seem to employ a less radically oppositional mode in their depictions of the relationships between their diasporic protagonists and the dominant white society of their host country than their British counterparts appear to do, and they are also less overtly political, which is especially true for Badami. Although social satire aimed at Canada's institutions and the lingering and yet sometimes quite sharply felt racist attitudes there can be observed in Mistry's stories, and instances of racism are criticized in Baldwin's collection, too, Badami's younger protagonist Kamini is much more preoccupied with coming to terms with her past than she is with using Canadian society at large as a target of her criticism. Yet, negotiations of the protagonists' liminal identities in the interstices of culture are just as complex and problematic as they are in Randhawa's and Rushdie's novels.

While the efforts to inscribe their presence on the body of the land of adoption the characters make in the Canadian books discussed here are less powerful, more attention is paid to the transformations, or their lack, in the original home, which also comes under criticism. The increased attention given to the ancestral land testifies to the transnational turn taking place in literature in the 1990s, which also gains expression in the free movement of the characters between the multiple locations they are attached to.

There was yet another reason for a greater appreciation of cultural plurality that enhanced the move towards diversity in the literary production of both countries, which Graham Huggan identifies as the "global commodification of cultural difference" (vii). Consequently, at the time when the books of the five authors discussed in this dissertation

were published there was a great demand and a growing readership for books like theirs. The emphasis on the ethnic background of the protagonists together with the descriptions of the problems rooted in their ancestral traditions may have been necessitated as much by political convictions and rules of narratology as by considerations of marketability. No matter what in fact the writers' primary motive may have been, the outcome was the heightening of attention to diasporic lives, which continues to be a welcome phenomenon of great significance in our global culture to this day.

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