

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Non-Conforming Women in Neoliberal Cities:
Re-thinking Empowerment in Contemporary
Diaspora Fiction and Film**

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**NON-CONFORMING WOMEN IN NEOLIBERAL CITIES:
RE-THINKING EMPOWERMENT IN CONTEMPORARY DIASPORA
FICTION AND FILM**

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PREFACE

No sane person can live without an identity. But the identity of a woman from a Third World country, such as India, becomes all the more complex due to social and cultural circumstances. I come from a Bengali family and I have noticed that my mother has never been referred to by her first name: when she was unmarried people would mention her as someone's daughter, and after her marriage her identity has remained limited to being someone's wife. Since our family is conservative, my parents and grandparents believed that men are supposed to go out and work while women should stay at home. For this reason, my mother has never been allowed to work. Thus, she has been a financially dependent woman. The patriarchal convention is so deep-rooted in Bengali culture that I have never seen her complaining about her subordinate position in the family and the identity that the patriarchal society has imposed on her.

The custom of addressing a woman, especially someone who is not financially stable, as someone's daughter or wife, or, at the most, by her "pet name" is a common tradition in Bengali culture: a Bengali child has a good name, which is to be used in the public, and a pet name, to be used by family and close friends¹. This practice is not only limited to my family in particular, it is rather common in India. Therefore, being addressed by one's first name, which I regard as a significant aspect of identity formation, has been really important to me as I grew up in India.

Since I have left my home country in order to pursue a PhD in Hungary, the question of identity has become all the more challenging for me, and the intersectional differences (especially my skin colour and accent) more prominent. Thus, for the primary resources of my dissertation, I have selected novels and films by South Asian female writers and film directors, who represent the difficulties involved in acquiring a sense of agency in their narratives. Nevertheless, it has to be foregrounded that my selected literary and cinematic texts portray diasporic immigrants in the West, while I am an expatriate in Hungary. Despite

¹I am going to discuss this question in detail in the third chapter of my dissertation, titled "Intersectionality and Its Impact on Identity Formation: A Comparative Analysis of South Asian Diasporic Female Characters" under the subsection "Identity and the South Asian Diaspora."

the difference between migrants and expatriates, and the associated problems that each group has, I can relate to the difficulties that the female characters experience in the narratives, especially from the South Asian perspective. For instance, problems related to decision making in the family, the questions of financial independence and the significance of native cultural practices in the host country are issues that resonate with my personal experiences. Therefore, this dissertation is not only a part of my PhD research but it also contributes to the creation of an identity which I am striving for, as I also desire to be addressed by my first name, not as someone's daughter or wife.

Acknowledgements

This doctoral dissertation is not just the result of my PhD research, rather, it reflects the journey I embarked on to create an identity for my own self. First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Ágnes Györke, whose constant feedback, patience, and guidance have enriched my project. I am also thankful to Éva Szabó and Fanni Feldmann, for being there for me, and my fellow warrior in the PhD programme at the University of Debrecen. I am highly indebted to all the professors and the colleagues I had the chance to discuss my topic with. Last, but not least, this journey would not have been possible without the support of my parents, my brother, and all my family members, who have always believed in me.

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INTRODUCTION

Non-Conforming Women in Neoliberal Cities: Re-thinking Empowerment in Contemporary Diaspora Fiction and Film

1. Introduction: Historical and Cultural Background

Cultural displacement has a significant impact on the lives of diasporic people. In my dissertation, I focus on the literary and filmic representations of South Asian² people's migration to the UK and the US after the Second World War. My primary aim is to explore the ways in which South Asian diasporic women redefine their identities in the selected literary and cinematic narratives I analyse. Apart from focusing on cultural displacement, I aim to investigate the complex role space and movement play in the representation of diasporic communities, the role of culinary cultures in female empowerment, and the impact of trauma on female identities. My primary focus is the portrayal of female characters of the South Asian diasporic community in the texts analysed. The literary narratives include Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Jhumpa Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's" from the collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989). The cinematic narratives are the following: Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) and *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994). The selected women writers and film directors "decentre rather than reinscribe the centrality of the West" (Ranasinha 7), which is an issue my dissertation investigates. In these works, I explore the search for hybrid identities and agency of the female characters in the neoliberal cities³, which I define as the cities⁴ that are the "loci for innovation and growth, and [are] zones of developed governance and local institutional experimentation" (Peck et al.). As my analysis showcases, these neoliberal cities help female characters become more empowered, even though the promise of freedom they offer often turns out to be misleading.

²The term "South Asian" refers to the people who come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (which was East Pakistan until 1971), Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives and sometimes Tibet and Burma (Carsignol 1). But the category "South Asian" remains highly contested as this expression is often used "indiscriminately to Asians in general or to Indians in particular" (Carsignol 1).

³In my dissertation, I define the concept of "city" as a large and important town, based on the definition of the Oxford Dictionary. I will analyse Western cities in the UK and the US, which include Boston, San Francisco, and New York City, among others. The only exception is Blackpool, a town in England. The seaside resort of Blackpool is the setting for Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach*. Within the corpus of my research, I will explore the way Blackpool town is urbanised in the narrative with the shops and entertainment set up in the location. Chadha's narrative compares Blackpool with Bombay, a metropolitan city in India.

⁴The concept of neoliberal city will be discussed in detail in the sub-section titled "Major Terms Explained". See page 13.

The texts I read investigate how female identities are construed in the interstitial place between “home,” the native land of the female protagonists, and the place of “exile,” which is the country of their destination. These narratives do not only explore how the characters feel but also how others see them. Furthermore, I will analyse the ways in which urban locations⁵ are constituted in these diasporic narratives. As the female characters of Ali, Lahiri, Divakaruni, Mukherjee and Chadha are displaced from their native land to the Western cities, they experience uprooting and re-rooting throughout their journey. During this constant flux the diasporic women come in contact with various cultures and communities which are different from their native traditions and customs. When these characters encounter the norms of the host culture, their identities transform. As my analysis showcases, four main attitudes can be observed among the female characters, which are, nevertheless, often combined: they either find a balance between the traditions of their home countries and the host nation; refuse to integrate into the host culture; reject their own cultural norms due to traumatic experiences; or adopt a more playful and subversive attitudes towards both cultures.

Though the focus of my dissertation is mainly on the narrativisation of the migratory experience of the South Asian female diasporic community after the Second World War, I will provide a brief description of the situation of migrants in the UK and the US before the War in order to highlight the significant changes the Second World War has brought, which led to the emergence of diasporic literatures in English. A diverse group of South Asian migrants had settled in Britain by the “early years of the twentieth century” (Visram 254), as Rozina Visram points out. As per records, the migrants can be categorised in three broad groups: firstly, the “personal servants of Imperial adventurers and administrators” (Ballard 199), who accompanied their British masters; seamen, who worked in British merchant ships. They later settled in port cities such as Glasgow, London, Liverpool, and Cardiff (Visram 256). The third group of migrants include the more “affluent travelers” (Ballard 199), who visited as professional workers, for example, doctors, civil engineers, merchants, and lawyers (Visram 255). The group of migrant workers included artisans, craftsmen, labourers, and traders who sold “ready-made clothes door-to-door” (Visram 255). However, until the beginning of the 20th century, the number of South Asian migrants in Britain had remained

⁵As Anderson points out, location refers to “place as an ‘objective’ point in space, a node, for example, which is ‘so-and-so’ far from another node. Location can therefore be defined by grid co-ordinates, or lines of latitude or longitude” (Anderson, First Edition 39).

insignificant (Ballard 199). The migrants included “no more than a few hundred Ayahs⁶ and Lascars⁷” (Ballard 199), a small number of students, and a number of Princes and other aristocrats (Ballard 199) mainly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Similar to the South Asian migrants who moved to the UK before the Second World War, a large group of South Asians settled in North America in the late 1800s. The earliest record of the Indian emigrant to the US was from Madras (presently known as Chennai), who migrated to Massachusetts in 1790 (Williams 2). Afterwards a number of Indians were moved to the US by “seafaring Captains who worked for the East India Company” (Williams 2). These Indians were mostly treated as servants. Though America had attracted some of the “most talented and energetic professionals, scholars and artisans” (Burki and Swamy 513), between 1907 and 1923 only “2.6 per cent of the 6,95,000 immigrants to the United States were in the professional trades, whereas 51 per cent were industrial or agricultural labourers” (Burki and Swamy 513-514). It was not an easy process for the South Asians to migrate to the US. In 1882, a range of policies and laws passed by the US Congress had restricted the entry of every Asian group from China, Japan, India and the Philippines (Hing 1). It was much later in the year 1965 which witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Asian immigrants in America (Hing 1). While between 1931 and 1965 only a mere 5 percent of all the immigrants entered the country legally, the number increased from 1 million in 1965 to over 7 million in 1990 (Hing 1). Thus, it is evident from the statistical records that the migration of the South Asian community to Western cities is not only a post Second World War phenomenon, though it became more significant in this period. Although immigrants from different professional fields have moved to Britain and America, the majority of them have worked as labourers.

The literary and filmic works I analyse depict the migration of South Asian characters to British and American cities after the Second World War. They move primarily in search of better job opportunities and a more convenient lifestyle. For instance, Ashoke in *The Namesake* and Mr. Sen in the short story entitled “Mrs. Sen’s” move to the US in order to attend university and eventually work there. Similarly, Chanu in *Brick Lane* and Mr. Bhamra in *Bend it like Beckham* migrate to the UK in search of jobs. While the first-generation male characters migrate to Western cities in search of better financial opportunities Ashima, Mrs.

⁶Ayah is a Hindi term for nanny.

⁷Lascar is a Hindi term for sailor.

Sen, Nazneen and Mrs. Bhamra, respectively, accompany their husbands mostly to escape patriarchal oppression in their home countries and pursue, for instance, a degree at a university or acquire a job which requires leaving the domestic realm.

After 1947, a large number of South Asian migrants have moved to the UK and the US, and from the 1950s onwards, when the British colonial rule throughout the world weakened, Britain has developed into a visibly “multicultural nation” (Bentley 17). With the introduction of the British Nationality Act of 1948, which enabled immigrants from former British colonies to enter the country (Bentley 17), London became the primary destination of these migrants. Several groups of people moved from the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and Africa and settled in Britain. Though these diasporas have changed the face of British society, this has not always been a smooth process (Bentley 17) and migration was controlled by further acts in 1962⁸, 1968⁹ and 1971,¹⁰ for instance. In spite of facing discrimination, migrants came to Western countries to seek better economic opportunities. Multicultural Britain is aptly represented in Ali’s *Brick Lane*: the title of the novel alludes to a street in Tower Hamlets, which is indeed where the Bangladeshi community lives in London. Similar to Ali’s narrative, Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham* also portrays the way Southall has become the main location for the Punjabis in the UK.

Cities in the US, such as New York City, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Charleston, have also been popular destinations for many migrants (Williams 3): Mukherjee’s novel, *Jasmine*, is partly set in New York City and Divakaruni’s magical realist narrative, *The Mistress of Spices*, is entirely set in San Francisco. A passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 enabled large-scale immigration from Asia to the US (Williams 5). In the United States, this act “abolished the discriminatory national-origins quota system”

⁸The Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 “controlled the immigration of all Commonwealth passport holders (except for those who held UK passports). Prospective immigrants...needed to apply for a work voucher, graded according to the applicant’s employment prospects” (“Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation”).

⁹“In 1967, Asians from Kenya and Uganda, fearing discrimination from their own national governments, began to arrive in Britain. They had retained their British citizenship following independence, and were therefore not subject to the act. The Conservative Enoch Powell and his associates campaigned for tighter controls. The Labour government responded with the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1968. It extended control to those without a parent or grandparent who was born in or was a citizen in the UK” (“Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation”).

¹⁰“The Conservative government announced the Immigration Act of 1971. The act replaced employment vouchers with work permits, allowing only temporary residence. ‘Patrials (those with close UK associations) were exempted from the act. It also tightened the immigration control administration and made some provision for assisting voluntary repatriation” (“Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation”).

("Immigration Act: United States 1965"). This act abolished discrimination based on race and nation of origin and created three major categories: "family reunification, professional skills and refugee status" (Williams 5). While Lahiri's protagonist, Ashima, moves to the US to stay with her husband, Ashoke, Divakaruni's and Mukherjee's main characters, Tilo and Jasmine, migrate in search of professional skills and to escape traumatic experiences. Exploring the narratives of these diasporic women, my dissertation will further focus on the impact urban locations have on the formation of female identities as well as the ways in which these places are seen and transformed from the perspective of migrant characters. I argue that neoliberal cities affect the identities of South Asian diasporic female characters: within the Western metropolis, the female protagonists transform from the subordinate beings they have been in their home countries and become more empowered individuals, though at the price of significant compromises they have to make in the West.

2. Theoretical Background

For the analyses of the literary and the cinematic narratives, I will rely on Avtar Brah's theory to explore diasporic women's desire to recreate their home culture in the host nation. As my dissertation not only traces the journey of the protagonists from their home countries to the UK and the US but also investigates their movement within Western cities, I will rely on Jon Anderson's notion of places and spaces to study the variety of geographical scales which play a significant role in redefining female identity. Doreen Massey's theory also helps me understand that space is not some "absolute independent dimension," but it is "constructed out of social relations" (Massey 2). The relationship between places and identity will be further explored with the help of Michel de Certeau's notion of walking in the city. As the female characters move within the urban areas, they appropriate the locations which also have an impact on their identity formation. In the presence of the main characters the urban places, which often offer a limited place for women, also become sites of empowerment. Thus, by appropriating the Western city spaces, these diasporic women redefine their identities. The transformation of the protagonists within the host nation will be explained by relying on Homi Bhabha's theory of third space, which he defines as a hybrid, middle ground that curves out a space for native cultures in the host nation (Bhabha). The narratives I analyse highlight that the main characters create an ambivalent third space in the West. On the one hand, they preserve some of their traditional customs, but, on the other, they acquire norms of the host culture. In other words, their integration is not seamless; they retain a sense of "otherness" (Bhabha 96). I will also discuss how the diasporic characters use empowering

strategies, such as parody and mimicry, which I read as acts of subversion, following in the wake of Bhabha. For the diasporic characters, mimicry, which refers to the mimicking of the host cultural norms, represents an “*ironic compromise*” (Bhabha 122, italics in the original). In other words, the colonised subjects mock and reproduce the traditions of the colonisers, which destabilises the authenticity of hegemonic cultures. However, Bhabha’s theory does not really take gender into account. According to him, native cultures pose a challenge for the colonisers and, therefore, are seen as a sly weapon to use against them. Nevertheless, their cultural traditions often fail to be empowering for female characters due to the patriarchal norms that characterize them. Since my aim is to investigate gendered attitudes towards South Asian culture, I depart from Bhabha’s theory and argue that besides mimicking Western culture, the diasporic female characters also mock their native traditions. This mockery, which is self-ironical in the case of South Asian women, contributes to subverting the patriarchal norms of their home countries.

In order to understand the hybridity of the protagonists, Bhabha’s concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism will help me analyse the disposition of diasporic characters. Bhabha divides diasporic immigrants into two broader groups: global and vernacular cosmopolitans. In contrast to the popular notion of cosmopolitanism as an elite phenomenon, Bhabha focuses on the migrants who flee violence and poverty (Werbner 497). These vernacular cosmopolitans maintain a hybrid identity, which Bhabha defines as follows: an “identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism” (Bhabha, 162, italics in the original). In this case, the two different cultures refer to the traditions of home countries and the country of residence of the diasporic characters.

As my selected works depict, neoliberal cities act as sites where the hybrid identities of diasporic characters are constructed. To analyse the position of the protagonists in the Western cities and their preferences for urban metropolises in contrast to less urbanised locations, David Harvey’s theory of neoliberalism and the concept of neoliberal cities will be used. My dissertation focuses on the individual freedoms and skills that appear with the introduction of free market (Harvey 2), which obviously come with limitations. To explore the impact of neoliberal cities on female identity, I will turn to the work of Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Smith, who claim that neoliberalism becomes what we are, a mode of our existence (Huehls and Smith 9). In other words, neoliberalism has a significant impact on identity formation. Huehls’ and Smith’s argument is based on Walter Benn Michaels’ theory of “the novel of identity” (Huehls and Smith 9), which posits that “place [has an influence]

on individual and cultural identity to the exclusion of larger structural understanding of the economy” (Huehls and Smith 9). In other words, neoliberalism grants, “even encourages, diversity and the expression of individuality,” but it does not challenge the “economic inequality at the root of neoliberal policy” (Huehls and Smith 9), which is a significant experience of migrant characters. The theories of Harvey, Huehls and Smith will enable me establish a connection between neoliberalism, and the formation of diasporic female identities in Western cities.

The formation of diasporic identities can be further explored with the help of Stuart Hall’s theory, which holds that “identification is always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is and that which is the other” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 69). As Hall primarily focuses on the Caribbean diaspora, it is Brah’s theory that will help me explore how identity is “constituted in and through culture” (Brah 21) in the South Asian diasporic context. It is also inevitable to acknowledge the internal differences that characterise South Asian diasporic identities and the discrimination that is incurred based on these differences. To probe into these internal differences such as differences in class, marital status, religion, and language, I will rely on Kimberle Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality to “highlight the need to account for multiple grounds of identity” (Crenshaw 1245) which characterises women of colour.

Food, cooking, and the serving of meals are recurrent themes in the novels and films I explore. Theories of Anita Mannur, Pere Gallardo and Jopi Nyman will be used to analyse the impact of food in these narratives, which, as I will show, acts not only as a symbol of cultural ties with the homeland but also as a medium for female expression. We can trace differences between the first and second-generation immigrants via their attitude towards food. To make a comparative study of the differences between the approach of the two generations, I will turn to the writings of Shashikala Assella. Her theories explain how diasporic women embrace a new culture in the host nation through the medium of their culinary skills. The first-generation characters do not give up their native traits. Rather they are even ready to use substitute ingredients to recreate native concoctions. On the contrary, the subsequent generations prefer Western dishes to what their mothers prepare.

To explore the impact of trauma on female identity, which will be analysed in Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Ali’s *Brick Lane*, I will rely on the theories of Cathy Caruth, Stef Craps, and Jeffrey Alexander. Caruth argues that trauma is “much more than a pathology, or

the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always a story of a wound that cries out” (Caruth 4). This is similar to the experiences that some of the protagonists undergo in the narratives I analyse. Moving away from their home countries, they are “asking to be seen and heard” (Caruth 9). However, Caruth’s theory fails to acknowledge non-Western experiences of trauma, which is an issue Craps and Alexander call attention to. They explore the limitations that are present in Caruth’s understanding of trauma. While Caruth conceptualises trauma as a universal notion, Craps and Alexander point out that in order to understand trauma, the internal differences concerning race, ethnicity, and culture are to be taken into consideration.

3. Identity: From the Perspective of Cultural Studies

One of the primary aims of my dissertation is to analyse how South Asian diasporic female characters reconstruct their identities in Western metropolises. Therefore, I will briefly discuss the concept of identity as defined from the perspective of cultural studies relying on the theories of Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Chris Barker, and Dariusz Galasiński. I will also touch upon the various types of identities, such as social, cultural, and ethnic identity, among others, that I will investigate in the individual chapters of my dissertation.

The concept of identity has been the “central theme of cultural studies throughout the 1990s” (Barker and Galasiński 87). Stuart Hall’s definition has been particularly influential. As he claims, “identity is always something constructed in discourse rather than some given sociological or biological essence that pre-exists representation” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 5). In other words, identity is not a “matter of self-creation,” rather, it is “constructed in and through a dialogic process – in which individuals attempt to develop a sense of their identity in (sometimes conflicted) interaction with identities thrust upon them by others” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 5). In the West, first-generation female characters construct an identity which is different from what they have acquired in their home countries. Drawing on Hall’s notion of identity, I argue that the identities of the diasporic female characters do not only develop internally: identities are also imposed on them as they are interpellated by various cultural and political discourses. This duality is evident in the narratives I analyse. On the one hand, Western cities delimit the place of female protagonists, but on the other hand, they also offer a sense of freedom as these diasporic women appropriate the neoliberal urban space they inhabit.

The notion of identity and culture are “inextricably linked concepts” as identity is “constituted in and through culture” (Brah 21). But before explaining the concept of cultural

identity the term “culture” needs to be explored. As Avtar Brah argues, there is “no single ‘right’ definition” (Brah 18) of culture. It may be defined broadly as the “symbolic construction of the vast array of a social group’s life experiences” (Brah 18). As culture evolves “through history,” it is “never static” (Brah 18). Furthermore, “no single identity can act as an overarching organizing core” (Barker and Galasiński 41) of cultural transformation. Similar to the dynamic nature of culture, identities are never static either: as Hall argues, identity “is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, S., “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 222). In other words, the cultural identity of an individual is a “matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (Hall, S., “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 225). Therefore, drawing on the theories of Hall, Brah, Barker and Galasiński, I claim that the South Asian diasporic characters are always in the process of reconstructing their identities vis-à-vis both the cultures they encounter in the West and their native traditions. Their ethnic¹¹ identity is “not a fixed universal essence, but an ordered way of speaking about persons” (Barker and Galasiński 125). With each shift in the geographical locations, they “construct for themselves unique identities by virtue of living across cultural boundaries” (Barker and Galasiński 159). By the end of the narratives, the main characters are often portrayed as transformed subjects who are in the process of acquiring a new, hybrid sense of self in between cultures.

4. Major Terms Explained: “Non-Conforming Women,” “Neoliberal City,” and “Empowerment”

In the title of my dissertation, I have used the terms “non-conforming women,” “neoliberal cities,” and “empowerment”. In this section, I will briefly explain why and how these terms are relevant in the context of diaspora literature, and why I rely on them to explore female identity in diasporic narratives. The female characters in the South Asian household are often portrayed as bearers of their home culture in the texts I explore. In most narratives diasporic female characters, especially first-generation immigrants, find it difficult to become independent and empowered, even when they are away from their home countries. For example, Mrs. Sen in Lahiri’s short story entitled “Mrs. Sen’s,” refers to her husband as “Mr. Sen,” instead of his first name or nick name. In traditional Indian households, a wife is not supposed to call her husband by his first name. In a similar manner, Ali’s heroine in *Brick Lane* is seen tolerating her husband’s demeaning remarks without questioning him. As

¹¹Barker and Galasiński argue that ethnicity is “always already constituted by representations formed through regulatory discourses of power” (Barker and Galasiński 125).

Nazneen's mother mentions it at the beginning of the novel, asking questions is a man's job, and women should leave everything to fate. But by the end of the narratives, it is seen that the protagonists do not entirely succumb to their traditional roles. They apply different strategies, such as mimicry, to overthrow conventions. They also prove themselves to be non-compliant by becoming financially independent, such as Ashima, Nazneen and Jasmine, and by challenging gender stereotypes. For instance, Jess in *Bend it like Beckham* plays football professionally, which is generally considered a masculine sport, or, Simmy, the tour coordinator in *Bhaji on the Beach*, drives a bus, which is primarily a male occupation. But it has to be foregrounded that despite their resistance there are certain norms that the diasporic women conform to. For example, even though the first-generation characters are in the West, they prefer their traditional attires and consume native dishes. The struggle between the desire to preserve their native cultures and the need to find their place in the West prompt them to create a middle ground where they can maintain ties with both worlds. The duality between preserving native cultural traditions yet refusing the patriarchal norms of their home countries is often expressed in the form of parody that the female protagonists perform in the host nation. These performances reveal non-conformism in the narratives. Furthermore, the female characters also subvert Western norms, which I read as instances of "mimicry," following in the wake of Homi Bhabha.

Neoliberal cities have a significant role in the lives of South Asian women in diasporic narratives. In my reading, neoliberal cities refer to those cities that can be described as follows:

[these cities are] promoted as [new regulatory scales] in order to bypass the weaknesses and constraints associated with the State level (corruption, plethoric bureaucracy, labour and environmental law, etc.); where the objectives of urban policies have shifted from the support of the reproduction of the labour factor to the support of capital accumulation...where civic liberties mean little compared to the imperative of generating growth. (Pinson and Journal 1-2)

Thus neoliberalism does not "exist in 'pure' form" rather it is "enmeshed, blended, and imbricated with other forms of governance" (Peck and Tickell 31). It is also obvious that Western cities do not offer unlimited freedom: "while the utopian rhetoric of neoliberalism is focused on the liberation of competitive markets and individual freedoms, the reality of neoliberal programs is that they are typically defined by the tasks of dismantling those alien

state and social forms that constituted their political inheritance” (Peck and Tickell 29). Despite the fact that neoliberal cities do not offer freedom for South Asian diasporic women in the classical sense of the term, cities such as London, Boston, and New York City provide some sort of protection which they have not been entitled to in their home countries. As Gilles Pinson and Christelle Journeel borrow Arjun Appadurai’s idea of “deep democracy”¹² to point out that neoliberal governmentality might foster more empowered identities:

neoliberal globalisation [unsettles] state institutions and regulations by urging local communities to build up their own projects instead of placing them under the tutelage of paternalist institutions, open windows of opportunity for the creation of more entrepreneurial, and possibly more autonomous and empowered, subjectivities among poor people and the achievement of a ‘deep democracy’.
(Pinson and Journeel 6)

In other words, “neoliberal governmentality can be ‘turned against itself’” (Pinson and Journeel 6). The narratives I analyse showcase that neoliberal cities enable female characters to become “calculative individuals” (Pinson and Journeel 6) and help them have a sense of agency, though they also impose norms and standards on them. Thus, even though these cities delimit the space of the female characters, they also contribute to their empowerment by helping them become self-sufficient individuals.

Besides non-conformism and the concept of the neoliberal city, female empowerment is another significant issue my dissertation explores. Even after they settle in the host nation, diasporic women are expected to follow the norms of their patriarchal home countries. They constantly struggle to perform the role of obedient housewives and caring mothers. But through the course of the narratives, they transform from insecure, dependent housewives into self-sufficient and responsible individuals. It has to be foregrounded here that even though the female characters are portrayed as empowered individuals in the West, the very concept of neoliberalism questions the notion of total independence. But, despite the limitations, they eventually profit from participating in the neoliberal market economy and gain agency to a certain extent.

¹²Arjun Appadurai in his article, titled “Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics” writes about the work of an alliance formed in Mumbai, India, to address poverty.

The origin of the notion of empowerment can be traced back to “varied domains as feminism, Freudian psychology, theology, the Black Power movement and Gandhism” (Calvès II). Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès points out that empowerment refers to principles, such as “the ability of individuals and groups to act in order to ensure their own well-being or their right to participate in decision-making that concerns them” (Calvès II). As represented in my selected literary and cinematic narratives, first-generation female protagonists become financially independent, and they also acquire the ability to make their own decisions. But it has to be foregrounded that the freedom of diasporic women comes at the price as they have to make compromises in the Western metropolis. While they are in a privileged position in the West as compared to their subordinate situation in the patriarchal societies of their home countries, they also need to conform to the norms imposed on them by the host nation.

To explain the term “empowerment,” Firdous Ahmad Dar and Priti Bhatt further claim that “empowerment is a process by which a specific destitute and discriminated class is being socially, economically, and politically uplifted. It is a multidimensional social procedure that assists individuals with overseeing their own lives” (Dar and Bhatt 92). In diasporic literature, the terms non-conforming, neoliberal, and empowerment are significant and relevant. With the help of these terms, I will explore the ways in which diasporic female characters are transformed in Western neoliberal cities. At the beginning, right after they move from their home countries to the West, they are either accompanied by their husbands when they step outside the house, or are, financially depended on them. Later, though all characters I analyse become more independent, the degree of empowerment is not the same for all of them. The division partly lies in their intersectional differences, such as social and economic status, religion, and finally, it is based on whether these women are first-generation migrants or are born in the host countries. To explore these differences, I will rely on theories of intersectionality, as mentioned in the section on theoretical background.

The following chapters are going to discuss issues related to migration, such as alienation, trauma, and rootlessness. I intend to further explore the impact of migration on the identity construction of diasporic female characters. The first chapter, titled “Neoliberal Cities as Sites of female Empowerment” discusses the reason why diasporic people choose to move to the Western metropolitan cities, how the female characters adapt to the new environment in the host nation while their male counterparts are busy with their university education and jobs, and how these female characters participate in the neoliberal market economy. The next chapter titled “‘Places and Spaces’: Transformative Perspectives in

Diasporic Narratives,” explores the ways in which Western urban places can be transformed into empowering spaces in diasporic narratives as they are appropriated by the female characters. I will further discuss the empowering strategies, for example, mimicry and parody, adapted by the characters to subvert both Western and native customs and norms. In the third chapter entitled “Intersectionality and Its Impact on Identity Formation: A Comparative Analysis of South Asian Diasporic Female Characters,” I will explore the internal differences that characterise diasporic female identities. I categorise these divisions on the basis of religion, class, social status, knowledge of the English language, and the generational differences between the characters in the narratives. On the one hand, I will investigate the impact of these differences on the formation of female identity, and, on the other hand, I will show that despite the differences there is solidarity among the female characters. Also, I will further explore that even though in many narratives women fight against the impact their husbands have on them, there are instances when male characters help the protagonists to become empowered.

The fourth chapter on “‘Home and Homelessness’: Nostalgia and Impact of Culinary Arts on Female Identity,” discusses how native cultures are preserved within the host nation. Diasporic women sometimes use substitute ingredients to recreate their cultural traditions, which I read as examples of “homing desire,” as defined by Avtar Brah. While home culture is preserved through various methods, such as cassettes, music, clothes, among others, food plays the most significant role in the lives of diasporic women. In this chapter, I will explore how engagement with food sometimes becomes the only mode of self-expression for the diasporic women. The fifth and final chapter, titled “‘Trauma and Healing’: The Journeys of Diasporic Women as an Escape Mechanism,” will probe into the impact of trauma on the female protagonists. I will study how the characters are sometimes direct victims of trauma, while at other times they become passive victims, haunted by the traumatic experiences of their near and dear ones. In short, my dissertation discusses the interconnectedness between migration, problems associated with displacement, including cultural, social, and psychological issues, as well as the ways in which identity is affected during and after migration. I focus on female characters to analyse these themes, aiming to explore women’s struggle to settle in the host culture, tracing the ways in which they keep empowering native customs, and finally, investigating how they redefine themselves by subverting those patriarchal norms that are enforced on them by their home countries. As my analysis will showcase, female characters adopt four different attitudes, which, nevertheless, may intersect.

Some of them attempt to find a balance between the traditions of their home countries and the host nation, for example, Ashima in Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Tilo in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*; they may refuse to integrate into the host culture, as Mrs Sen in Lahiri's short story; some characters reject their own cultural traditions due to traumatic experiences, as Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel; and some may adopt a more playful and subversive attitude towards both cultures, which is characterised by mimicry and parody, as Chadha's films showcase.

CHAPTER 1

Neoliberal Cities as Sites of Female Empowerment

1. Introduction

After the Second World War, South Asian diasporic people, especially men, moved to the West in search of a better life and job opportunities. Their female counterparts have been “accompanying spouses” (Piper 1292), as they have been migrating primarily for familial reasons. The husband has been, and still is, a patriarchal figure who makes decisions about whether his wife accompanies him or not. Thus, migration, as represented in diasporic texts, is a “gendered” (Sigroha 93) journey. Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonists, Ashima and Mrs. Sen, accompany their husbands, who study and work at a university; Monica Ali’s main character, Nazneen, joins her husband, who works in London. Gurinder Chadha’s first-generation female characters, Mrs. Bhamra, Pushpa, and Asha, also move to the UK to be with their husbands and start a family there. However, there are two exceptions in my selected texts: Chitra Divakaruni’s novel, *The Mistress of Spices* relies on magic realism to transport the heroine, Tilo, from India to America, and Jasmine, in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, moves to the US in search of a better life after the trauma of her husband’s death. Thus, similar to South Asian diasporic women who have migrated to the Western countries primarily for the sake of families, most of the female protagonists in the texts I explore move to the West as accompanying partners of their husbands who are there due to their career.

This chapter will explore the ways in which female identities are formed in neoliberal cities. Although I am aware of the fact that there is a difference between the situation of relatively privileged migrants and undocumented refugees, the diasporic novels I analyse offer rather optimistic conclusions. As I will show, the participation of diasporic women in the neoliberal market economy is not only an essential part of their survival in Western cities, it also helps them become empowered individuals. Before exploring the significance of neoliberal cities in the narratives, however, let me discuss the concept of neoliberalism and its relevance in the South Asian diasporic context in detail.

2. Neoliberalism and its Relevance in the South Asian Diasporic Context

Neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasises “the value of free market competition” (“Neoliberalism”). It is a “distinctive political-economic philosophy that took meaningful shape for the first time during the 1970s, dedicated to the extension of market (and market-

like) forms of governance, rule, and control across – tendentially at least – all spheres of social life” (Peck and Tickell 28). Critics such as Huehls and Smith view neoliberalism as a “‘political rationality’ that ‘involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action’” (Huehls and Smith 2). They argue that there are “four different phases or modes” of neoliberalism: “the economic, the political-ideological, the sociocultural, and the ontological” (Huehls and Smith 3)¹³. The neoliberal ideology believes in the “embedded liberalism – a free-market economy ‘embedded’ in a social safety net ensuring some semblance of justice and parity” (Huehls and Smith 4). For the diasporic female characters, who are otherwise limited by patriarchal oppression, participating in the free-market trade in the West provides an opportunity to interact with the norms of the host nation. The ideology of neoliberalism inadvertently normalises the entrepreneurial as a mode of freedom in contemporary Britain and in the United States.

However, despite the fact that neoliberalism advocates freedom, the concept of neoliberal freedom itself brings forth “compulsion and constraint” (Han 1). To probe further into the notion of individual freedom, Byung-Chul Han argues that “individual freedom represents a ruse” (Han 3). As Han points out, neoliberalism “represents a highly efficient, indeed an intelligent, system for exploiting freedom. Everything that belongs to practices and expressive forms of liberty...comes to be exploited” (Han 3). Neoliberal regime “does not really free us at all” (Han 3). Therefore, the financial freedom and liberty that the main characters enjoy in the neoliberal cities are deceptive. This is because once the women are in the West, they realise their need to participate in the public economy of the city, not merely in the private one, if they desire to have “any public existence at all” (Zeigler 158-59). Thus, female characters are constrained by the logic of the market and their choices are limited depending on what the market economy requires from them.

The implementation of neoliberal policies has affected the global economy which has resulted in further social and financial inequalities. Neoliberalism has become more significant with the ground-shifting elections of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States (Peck and Tickell 28). Even though the utopian

¹³The economic and political-ideological phases of neoliberalism “largely correspond to postmodernism’s prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, a period that saw a handful of early literary attempts to represent and respond to neoliberal policies” (Huehls and Smith 3). The sociocultural and ontological phases “coincide with the period beginning in the 1990s when postmodernism started to lose purchase as both a theoretical and an aesthetic paradigm” (Huehls and Smith 3).

rhetoric of neoliberalism focuses on the “liberation of competitive markets and individual freedom” (Peck and Tickell 29), in reality, the neoliberal program, based on the Thatcherian model, is aimed to dismantle those “alien state and social forms that [constitute] their political inheritance” (Peck and Tickell 29). The expansion of global economy recognises the need to “‘put forth an economic model’ or migration ‘which surpasses the historical relations between the imperialist nations and the semi-colonies of the Third World’” (Petras 40). The difference between more developed and peripheral countries has increased the social and economic gap between affluent global elites and dispossessed migrants (Canterbury 6-7), thus giving rise to unequal power relations.

David Harvey, however, offers a more positive interpretation of neoliberalism. He defines this ideology as a theory of “political economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2). Harvey also points out that if neoliberalisation is to be a vehicle to restore class power, the class forces behind it have to be identified along with those who have been benefited from it (Harvey 31). But “class” is not a “stable social configuration” (Harvey 31) and it means different things in different places, and often it has no meaning at all (Harvey 31). Jhumpa Lahiri, Monica Ali, Chitra Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee and Gurinder Chadha¹⁴ have highlighted in their works how the social and economic situations in the underdeveloped countries, such as India and Bangladesh, have forced people to migrate to neoliberal cities in the West. For the diasporic immigrants, especially for the female characters, the neoliberal cities have provided individual entrepreneurial freedom to some extent, for example, in the case of Ashima, Tilo, Nazneen and Jasmine. This freedom is akin to the liberation and entrepreneurialism that Harvey elaborates on in his theory of neoliberalism. But, on the contrary, my selected works also shed light on the social inequalities resulting from the class disparity among the characters,

¹⁴Chadha has called South Asian diasporic film an “interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood...[defining] this hybrid cinema as resulting from the migratory processes engendered by capitalism” (Desai ix). Regarding the significant role that cinema has played in the development of South Asian diasporic cultures, Jigna Desai claims that though it is the literary works of South Asian diasporic writers which garners popular and academic attention in postcolonial studies, “it is cinema that reaches tens, if not hundreds of millions of viewers. Film has played a featured role in the formation of South Asian diasporic cultures, partially because of its key role in South Asia itself” (Desai vii-viii). But at the same time, Chadha’s works have to confirm to the norms of the Western neoliberal market economy. Therefore, the accounts of labour, hardships, inequalities and violence that most of the working-class Indians had to endure after moving to the UK are left out and the narratives offer exquisite happy endings.

echoing Dennis Canterbury's claim that the power relations between "global elites" and "migrants" (Canterbury 6-7) are unequal. For instance, the way in which Ashima, who belongs to the middle-class, participates in neoliberal "freedom" is different from the experiences of Nazneen, who has to take on a menial job to support her family in London.

Exploring the significance of Western urban locations in the world economy, Ágnes Györke, following in the wake of Saskia Sassen, points out that "[g]lobal cities¹⁵, such as New York, London, Tokyo, Frankfurt, and Paris, fulfil a pivotal role in the organization of the world economy; they are production sites for the leading information industries; they have a specialised and networked service sector; they function as sites of production and markets for the products" (Györke, "Reading the Metropole" 41). The Western neoliberal cities prove useful for the global elites. In other words, the global elites benefit from neoliberalism as opposed to the poor migrants who are the victims of the unequal power relations. As Harvey points out, though "neoliberalization has not been effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, [...] it has succeeded [...] in restoring, or in some instances [...] creating the power of an economic elite" (Harvey 19). Relying on Harvey's notion of entrepreneurial freedoms, I argue that despite the obvious differences between dispossessed migrants and well-to-do elites, migrants also benefit from neoliberalism to some extent. For instance, female characters in my selected narratives are forced to participate in the free-market economy, yet the Western cities, for example, London, Boston, San Francisco, New York City, and even Blackpool are portrayed as locations that both shelter protagonists and offer them a sense of empowerment. In other words, the neoliberal cities guarantee a degree of protection for these women compared to what they have been entitled to in their home countries. This is because, though the female characters are marginalised, even doubly marginalised due to their race and gender, neoliberal cities still provide an opportunity to these women to become emancipated and have a degree of financial independence. As the narratives showcase, nevertheless, the experience of this "freedom" is deceptive and depends on intersectional differences to a great extent.

3. Cosmopolitanism: South Asian Diasporic Characters as Vernacular Cosmopolitans

The discourse of neoliberalism gives rise to the development of cosmopolitanism, which is identified with "western city lifestyles regarding taste, culture and the mixture of

¹⁵The term "global city" was popularised by Saskia Sassen, who has investigated the function of cities in the globaleconomy (Györke, "Reading the Metropole" 41).

diverse populations” (Vieten 1). In fact, cosmopolitanism is often seen as an ethical response to the neoliberal condition. According to Ulrike Vieten, the “notion of *cosmopolitan* could be a cocktail” (Vieten 1, italics in the original), which refers to “individuals who have the desire to widen their perspectives through being exposed to different cultures, appreciate them while remaining attached to their own culture, and have a sense of morality and social justice” (Sato 62). The South Asian diasporic characters can be classified as cosmopolitans in the narratives I investigate. This is because, due to their displacement from the home countries to the Western metropolitan cities, the characters are exposed to diverse cultures. But at the same time, these characters, especially diasporic women, try to preserve their native traditions in the host nation.¹⁶ In contrast to the “political community outlook [which] unfolds predominantly as male business” (Vieten 1), my aim is to present “a feminist perspective that engages with cosmopolitanism as a source that can strengthen female resistance to oppression and supports an alternative socio-cultural framework for bonding people, globally” (Vieten 1). Reading diasporic migrant characters as cosmopolitans, this chapter contests James Clifford’s argument that cosmopolitans are necessarily “members of the elite” (Clifford, “Travelling Cultures” 106-07). Relying on Homi Bhabha’s notion of “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Bhabha xiv), I will depict how the characters, for example, Mukherjee’s heroine, Jasmine, Ali’s protagonist, Nazneen, and Divakaruni’s main character, Tilo, who belong to the lower strata of the society, can be read as examples of vernacular cosmopolitan individuals.

The history of cosmopolitanism originates in ancient Greece: “the first philosopher in the West to give perfectly explicit expression to cosmopolitanism was the Socratically inspired Cynic Diogenes¹⁷ in the fourth century BCE” (“Cosmopolitanism”). Later, the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism, which became dominant since the Enlightenment, has been critiqued by Miriam Sobré-Denton and Nilanjana Bardhan as an “absolute Western white, modernist and rationalist universalism” (Sobré-Denton and Bardhan 18). In other words, Kant’s vision of cosmopolitanism is limited because of his “Eurocentric thinking” (Sato 55), as it suggests that “only the elite can attain global citizenship” (Sato 56) status. Arjun Appadurai, nevertheless, defines cosmopolitanism as a notion which is “usually contrasted with various forms of rootedness and provincialism...The cosmopolitan is often

¹⁶The fourth chapter will explore the various methods, such as letters, culinary art, music, among others, that diasporic women use to preserve their native traditions. See page 98.

¹⁷It is believed that “when [Diogenes] was asked where he came from, he replied, ‘I am a citizen of the world [*kosmopolitês*]’” (“Cosmopolitanism,” italics in the original).

identified with the exiled, the traveler, the seeker of the new, who is not content with his or her historically derived identity, biography and cultural values” (Appadurai 4). Though the diasporic characters in my selected works show traits of Appadurai’s view of cosmopolitanism as they are not limited by their native identities and constantly redefine themselves, they are best understood with the help of Bhabha’s theory. As Bhabha points out, diasporic immigrants can be divided into global and vernacular cosmopolitans. Global cosmopolitans, according to Bhabha, are privileged and frequently “inhabit ‘imagined communities’ that consist of silicon valleys and software campuses” (Bhabha xiv). On the contrary, vernacular cosmopolitans move “in-between cultural traditions” and reveal “hybrid forms of life” (Bhabha xiii). This vernacular cosmopolitan community is “envisaged in *marginality*” (Werbner 497, italics in the original). The representation of the female protagonists, in the novels and films that I analyse is akin to Bhabha’s notion of vernacular cosmopolitans since they are dispossessed and are in a marginal position in the West.

The “border zone” (Werbner 497) status of a vernacular cosmopolitan is depicted in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*. Although the narrative does not provide information about the protagonist’s financial status, Jasmine is a “professional, like a school teacher or a nurse” (Mukherjee 175) and is outside the elite group. Though Mukherjee’s heroine moves away from her homeland to escape her traumatic past and is somewhat in a privileged situation in the US, she finds American culture “humiliating” and “disappointing” (Mukherjee 29): “I wish I’d known America before it got perverted” (Mukherjee 201). Despite her resentment of the host cultural norms, Jasmine desires to be a part of American society. She requests Professorji, the teacher of her husband, who has been murdered as a result of a political riot, to arrange a green card for her. She wants a “green card more than anything else in the world, [believing] that a green card [is] freedom” (Mukherjee 149). The protagonist’s marginal status is further highlighted when Professorji asserts that the green card “is an expensive but not an impossible proposition. For the rich, such a matter is arranged daily” (Mukherjee 149). Thus, it becomes clear from the narrative that Jasmine does not belong to an elite group in society. Rather, Mukherjee’s heroine becomes a vernacular cosmopolitan in the US as she starts to work in a bank, thus participating in the neoliberal market economy.

4. The Impact of Neoliberal Cities on Diasporic Female Identity

In the literary works that I analyse, diasporic characters, similar to the vernacular cosmopolitans, move from their home countries and settle in Western neoliberal cities. In the beginning of the narratives the male characters of the diasporic community either work, as

Mr. Bhamra and Chanu, or, are enrolled as university students, as Ashoke, for example. The career opportunities that the characters have in the West, whether job or education, help them participate in the neoliberal market economy. According to Huehls and Smith, neoliberal markets “do not determine the subjects acting within them. [The markets do] not require specific economic pursuits, political commitments, or ideological beliefs; [they only require the subjects’] presence...being in and of it” (Huehls and Smith 9). With the gradual progression of the narrative plots, it becomes evident that not only the male characters but also the female protagonists participate in the free-market economy. For instance, Nazneen gets a job in garment business; Tilo works in a spice store; Ashima works in a public library, and Jasmine serves as a caregiver and later gets a job in a bank.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen’s husband does not want her to work after they move to London from Bangladesh¹⁸. But eventually she realises the necessity to become financially independent and the fact that she needs to change her attitude: “She [has] thought it would be a matter of trying. Now she [realises] that the work would come later. First she [has] to imagine” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 488) herself as an independent individual. For a woman, coming from a village in Bangladesh and settling down in London is not easy, but Ali’s protagonist gradually gains confidence in the narrative:

Hanufa passed the drawing to Nazneen...‘What about white organza for the scarf?’ said Nazneen. ‘Nice contrast.’ ‘They don’t pay us to design as well,’ said Razia...‘Why not?’ said Nazneen...‘They can pay extra for it.’ ‘Do it then. You make a design. I’ll sell it’. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 480-81)

In my reading, the above episode highlights that Nazneen, who has always been at the mercy of her father in Bangladesh and her husband in London, gets an opportunity to make her voice heard. Selecting a garment design may seem a trivial issue, but for Ali’s protagonist it marks a step towards her independence. -Nazneen’s opinion has never been valued in the family since her childhood. For example, her father was entitled to select her partner: “Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 16). In another episode, she is portrayed as a homesick person who wants to return to Bangladesh: “Six month now since she’s been sent away to London. Every morning before she opened her eyes she thought, *if I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish*”

¹⁸When Nazneen is born, Bangladesh is still East Pakistan, but when she leaves, it is already Bangladesh.

(Ali, *Brick Lane* 18, italics in the original). Her husband, however, does not encourage her to go back, though in the end, it is Chanu who returns to their home country. Thus, Nazneen considers herself worthy as an individual when Razia, her best friend in London, not only supports her choice but also encourages her decision to become a garment designer. Similar to Ali's main character, Ashima too, overcomes her dependence on her husband as she starts to work at a public library in America: "Three afternoons a week and two Saturdays a month" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 162). Ashima's signing of her "small pay-checks over to Ashoke" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 162) marks the protagonist's engagement in the market economy in the US, which grants her a degree of empowerment.

Akin to Ali's and Lahiri's main characters, who come out of their comfort zone and work in the host nation, Mukherjee's protagonist, Jasmine, is also proud of her professional status in America: "I [am not] a maid-servant... I [am] family, and I [am] professional" (Mukherjee 175). Although Divakaruni's narrative is a magic-realist novel, the protagonist, similar to other diasporic female characters, participates in the neoliberal market economy. Tilo is magically placed in an Indian spice store in San Francisco, which is described as a comfortable space for her: "The store. Even for those who know nothing of the inner room with its sacred, secret shelves, the store is an excursion into the land of might-have-been" (Divakaruni 5). Tilo does not regret leaving the island of the spices, where she has been trained to be a mistress, and come to San Francisco to work as a shopkeeper, as "for this store... [she has] brought together everything [one needs] in order to be happy" (Divakaruni 7). In my interpretation, the female characters partake in the neoliberal market economy not only to support their families financially, stepping outside their houses for work is also an act of subversion as they overthrow the stereotypical notion that women are supposed to stay indoors and serve their families.

These acts of subversion performed by the female characters are clearly evident in the novels and the films I explore. For example, in Ali's *Brick Lane*, the main character, besides getting a job in a garment business, also decides to join a political organisation, the Bengal Tigers, in Tower Hamlets. This act may seem trivial on the surface, but for a Muslim woman, such as Nazneen, joining an Islamic group is a significant step towards empowerment. Although it has to be foregrounded that it is Karim who inspires her to go to the meetings, she still finds attending these events a new experience. It is a stereotypical notion in South-Asian households, especially within Muslim communities, that women are not encouraged to join political organisations. Neither are they encouraged to go out without their husbands. As

Chanu asserts in the beginning of the narrative, “[i]f you go out, ten people will say, ‘I saw her walking on the street.’ And I will look like a fool” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 45). Thus, for Nazneen, not only stepping outside her house and working in a garment business is an act of subversion but joining a male-dominated political organization as well.

The literary and the cinematic texts highlight that even though diasporic female characters move to the West primarily for the sake of their families, in the narratives their “movement expresses a yearning for a society in which authorities do not determine the behaviour of humans but humans determine and organize themselves” (“Antiglobalization”). Although migration is considered a historical process, under neoliberal globalisation it has undergone significant transformation as now there is a strong pressure to emigrate, given the lack of job opportunities in countries of origin and the “growing vulnerability and exploitation of migrant workers” (Wise and Márquez 2) in destination countries. The economic pressure on the diasporic characters is clearly depicted in Mukherjee’s novel. Jasmine’s husband, Prakash, is frustrated with the job market in Punjab. Despite his degree in engineering, he is not satisfied with his job. In fact, he has two jobs: “one as a repairman and bookkeeper for Jagtiani and Son Electrical Goods, and the other as a math tutor to a dreamy boy of thirteen” (Mukherjee 79). He does not like working at Mr. Jagtiani’s and complains that “[he is] an inventor” (Mukherjee 80) who deserves a much more creative job, and “[he] shouldn’t have to lie and cheat and be that louse’s accomplice!” (Mukherjee 80). Because of his vulnerable economic situation in India, Prakash wants to migrate to the US: “Listen to me, Jasmine. I want for us to go away and have a real life. I’ve had it up to here with backward, corrupt, mediocre fools” (Mukherjee 81). Similar to Prakash, Ashoke in *The Namesake* also begins to “envision another sort of future” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 20) for himself. Though Ashoke is in an economically privileged position compared to Prakash, he too dreams of going as far as he can from his place of birth, especially after a train accident in Calcutta, which nearly killed him. He remembers Mr. Ghosh, his companion on the train, who has regretted returning from England for the sake of his wife (Lahiri, *Namesake* 33). Although Ashoke moves to America in order to get a degree, he feels guilty for marrying Ashima and bringing her to Cambridge, Massachusetts (Lahiri, *Namesake* 33), separating her from her family. Thus, a yearning for better opportunities and a false promise of freedom offered by neoliberal Western cities make the characters leave their home countries and loved ones.

Highlighting the impact of migration under neoliberal capitalism, Dennis Canterbury argues that development depends on the use of “managed or controlled migration” to secure migrant labour (Canterbury 8). In other words, from the neoliberal point of view, capitalist development is based on the engagement of humans to produce commodities for exchange in capitalist markets (Canterbury 8-9), which is a highly exploitative practice. The exploitation of the migrant workers is evident in Ali’s narrative. As Chanu, Nazneen’s husband, asserts, he gradually loses his naive dreams as he experiences exploitation in Britain:

When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister...That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn’t know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 34)

The above-mentioned episode from *Brick Lane* suggests that migrants are yearning for a society which seems to offer the possibility of self-fulfilment. Chanu’s naive dreams of becoming a “Private Secretary to the Prime Minister” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 34), or a “Right-hand Bloody Man of the Bloody Prime Minister” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 374) indicate the reason why he has left his home country. But his “initial optimism turns into disillusionment and pessimism in time” (Töngür 256), and he becomes a victim of racism, discrimination, and oppression. He supposes that “if he [paints] his skin pink and white then there would be no problem” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 72). In other words, the social privilege that Chanu had in Bangladesh is no longer visible in Britain. Though neoliberal cities in the West provide opportunities to migrant workers, then, migrants are also subdued due to the constant humiliation they experience: London in *Brick Lane*, for instance, “bequeathed [their] law and democracy...begged [them]...[and] brought [them] to [their] knees” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 249), as Chanu asserts. The prevalent struggle of the immigrant workers in the host nation is shown through Chanu’s frustration: “As long as we are below them, then they are above something. If they see us rise then they are resentful because we have left our proper place” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 38). Thus, even though diasporic characters have better opportunities in the West, this comes at the price of ill-treatment and oppression.

Cities in the UK and the US are sites for the diasporic female characters where they take part in, and are constrained by, the neoliberal market economy, but these urban places are also the locations where protagonists perform acts of subversion. Diasporic women subvert both the patriarchal traditions of their home countries and the conventions of the host nation. Working from home is a neoliberal ideal, for instance, which offers the illusion of freedom, yet those who work from home often become all the more exploited. They work “beyond expectations and requirements” (Brouillette 529) as they “strive to unearth [their] authentic [selves], to identify [their] deepest passions, in order to achieve [their] self-fulfilment, career success, and the betterment of [their] community all at once” (Brouillette 530). Exploitation is primarily due to the fact that there is no clear distinction between working hours and free time. Ironically, by normalising work from home neoliberalism becomes complicit with the patriarchal norms of the diasporic characters’ home countries, since it is easier for husbands to accept that their wives work if they do it at home. Nevertheless, the narratives also showcase that diasporic female characters use “work as a means of self-fulfilment and personal exploration” (Brouillette 529). They see their “career success as essential to self-worth,” (Brouillette 529) they view their “work as a calling and a passion” and their “feelings and experiences as a wellspring for creativity” (Brouillette 529). For instance, Nazneen begins with the “craft of tailoring” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 208) at home before she officially engages herself in the garment business with Razia. This “craft of tailoring” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 208) can be considered as a feminine art which she can do at home and therefore, she does not immediately violate the expectations of her native cultural traditions. Each small event the protagonists perform “seems like an enormous accomplishment” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 183). The higher these diasporic women rise in their professional fields, the more independent they become as individuals. Hence, despite the constraints and exploitation that characterises neoliberal work conditions, diasporic women become more empowered through work as it allows them to have a degree of financial freedom. This financial freedom indeed goes against the patriarchal traditions of their home countries. Thus, for diasporic female characters, working from home can be considered as an act of subversion.

Even though the main characters experience repression and even humiliation in the neoliberal cities, they can find people and networks who assist them. They seem to find their places and communities, eventually: “For every fish, there is a fisherman; for every deer a hunter. For every monster a hero” (Mukherjee 97). In the host nation the “highest mission”

(Mukherjee 97) of the female characters is “to create [a] new” (Mukherjee 97) identity. Thus, eventually the characters evolve as responsible individuals. For example, by the end of Lahiri’s novel, Ashima learns “to do things on her own” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 276). After the demise of her husband, she is no longer dependent on her son or daughter. Similar to Ashima, who decides to live her life on her own terms, Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, after Chanu returns to Bangladesh, also starts her life anew in London. She affirms her daughters that they will “decide what to do. Staying or going, it’s up to” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 480) the three of them. Akin to Lahiri’s and Ali’s protagonists, Divakaruni’s heroine, Tilo, also acquires a degree of freedom. Although she has not migrated to the US as a dependent spouse, she has been bounded by the rules of the spices, who control her magically as if they were deities. In my reading, spices in *The Mistress of Spices* act as patriarchal figures. Similar to Chanu, who never encourages Nazneen to go out alone and belittles her desire to learn English, the spices in Divakaruni’s novel also impose rules and norms on the mistresses: for instance, they should not step outside their spice shops, touch their customers and use the spices for their own purposes. As instructed by the First Mother, the teacher on the island of the spices where Tilo stays before she is transported to the US, the mistresses are “not important...What is important is the store. And the spices” (Divakaruni 5). Thus, Tilo, along with her sister mistresses, is forced to abide by the norms set by the spices. But by the end of the novel, she is free from these limitations: “no sister-Mistresses to circle” her and “no First Mother” (Divakaruni 317) to restrict her. She “now [has] only [herself] to hold [her] up” (Divakaruni 317). It is clear from the narrative that her work helps her leave patriarchal norms behind. Though she does not entirely discard the spices, eventually, she comes to terms with them. Thus, the protagonists tend to gain a degree of agency in the narratives I explore and subvert the patriarchal norms of their home cultures as a result.

5. Female Agency in Neoliberal Cities

The issues concerning women’s status and independence have been widely discussed problems for many years: as Janeen Baxter and Emily W. Kane point out, “[w]omen’s dependence on men has received little attention in the literature on gender attitudes, despite its centrality to feminist theory...[this] dependence operates at two interrelated, but distinct, levels: the societal level and the individual level” (Baxter and Kane 193-94). The literary narratives show that victimisation continues even when the female protagonists migrate to the West. Diasporic women are constrained both by the patriarchal traditions of their home countries and the neoliberal norms of their host countries: the freedom of the protagonists, or,

in other words, the choices that they make depend on their native traditions as well as on what the market economy requires from them.

Similar to other diasporic narratives, *Brick Lane* highlights that a diasporic woman is considered “a stable signifier of ‘tradition’ [and] her strict adherence to the home tradition is maintained to ensure its permanence in the metropolis” (Hasan 61). For most part of the narrative plot, the protagonist remains an “unspoilt [woman]. From the village” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 22). Even though she starts to work as a needlewoman, for which Karim provides the materials, and later she engages in the garment business with Razia, both are home-based work, which goes against the patriarchal norms of Bangladesh to some extent but is not considered as subversive as having a job in the city. Md. Mahmudul Hasan points out that the work Nazneen does at home “is thought to be more amenable to domestic norms and purdah practices and helps her keep away from working men in public life” (Hasan 66). Working from home seems to be the only option for Nazneen as, in contrast to other diasporic female characters in my selected narratives, she has to follow the strict religious norms of Islam. As Naila Kabeer argues,

[i]n Bangladesh, a country where strong norms of purdah, or female seclusion, [has] always confined women to the precincts of the home and where female participation in public forms of employment [has] historically been low, the apparent ease with which women [appear] to have abandoned old norms in response to new opportunities [goes] against the grain of what has been presented in the development literature as one of the least negotiable patriarchies in the world. By contrast, in Britain...Bangladeshi women [are] largely found working from home, in apparent conformity with purdah norms. (Kabeer viii)

Nazneen’s situation is rather similar in *Brick Lane*. Even though the “metropolitan society of London is supportive of [her] participation in outside employment, transplanted domestic ideology restricts [her] appearance in public” (Hasan 67). Thus, the fact that Ali’s protagonist adheres to the patriarchal and religious norms of her home culture makes it more difficult for her to gain empowerment in the neoliberal West.

Being always controlled by her father and her husband, Nazneen, at first, is bewildered by the progressive attitude of Mrs. Azad and Razia: Mrs. Azad, wife of Dr. Azad, her husband’s friend, is the “epitome of the assimilated immigrant with her short skirt and emphatic cleavage, her eating habits, [and] smoking and drinking” (Pataki 178); and Razia,

Nazneen's best friend, is a "self-sufficient, independent woman after her husband's death: [she] wears a Union Jack sweater and her hair [is] cut short, [she] smokes and curses, and ignores the community's low opinion of her...[and] takes the chances offered by liberal British culture" (Pataki 179). Although it has to be foregrounded here that there is a difference between the financial status of Mrs. Azad and Nazneen: while Mrs. Azad is the wife of a doctor, Nazneen's husband has an unprestigious job in London, which he loses at the beginning of the narrative. Furthermore, the narrative hints at the struggle that Razia faces in the UK: she has lived in an abusive marital relationship; later she supports her children as a single parent, and finally, deals with her teenage son's drug addiction. She laments: "Just bury me now. I am as good as dead" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 231). Therefore, it becomes clear to the readers that Razia, too, had been a victim of oppression before she started to fight for her own agency in the host nation. Nevertheless, both Razia and Mrs. Azad exemplify sophisticated immigrants in the novel, who speak fluent English, go out to work, and refuse to wear sari, a traditional attire of Bangladeshi women. Refusing to act according to conventions, these female characters challenge patriarchal norms. As Mrs. Azad asserts:

Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English...they go round covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 93)

But eventually, Nazneen, supported by Razia and other characters,¹⁹ becomes a courageous woman: Éva Pataki points out that even though she "does not leave the confines of domestic space for work, the fact that she contributes to the family's earnings signals a shift in power relations – a working wife considerably undermines Chanu's Muslim male superiority, which he wanted to sustain by his arranged marriage to the 'unspoilt girl' from the village" (Pataki 179). Towards the end of the novel, Nazneen decides to raise her daughters in London without the support of her husband.

The role of consumer culture and its impact on female identity is also one of the main themes of *The Mistress of Spices*. As Grewal argues, the novel maps the connection between

¹⁹I will discuss the issue of solidarity in the third chapter of my dissertation where I analyse how male and female characters act as catalysts in the transformation of the protagonists. See page 90.

“consumer culture and its search for the exotic, [which supports the] discourse of a multicultural America [by producing] ethnic identity through exotic difference” (Grewal 76). In Divakaruni’s narrative, San Francisco becomes the centre of attraction for better job opportunities and offers a more comfortable lifestyle compared to what the main character, Tilo, has left behind. Not unlike Ali’s heroine, Nazneen, who has not been encouraged to leave the house and work in her home country, Tilo, who is practically an orphan, did not have a financially secure background in India. With her training in the land of spices²⁰, she serves her customers by selecting the right kind of exotic spices for them. These spices are not only useful for gastronomical purposes, but they also have healing effects which cure the customers both physically and emotionally. In other words, Tilo and the products she sells are perceived as a unique, exotic entities in San Francisco. Participating in the consumer economy, she becomes an “architect of the immigrant dream” (Divakaruni 28): “See this is America, it’s not so bad” (Divakaruni 40), as she asserts. Therefore, Tilo is deprived of a meaningful sense of identity because she is seen, in fact, produced as the “exotic Other” in American society. But, even then, it can be argued that by participating in the neoliberal market economy she is able to establish herself as a financially stable individual through her “exotic difference” (Grewal 76) in the West.

Akin to Nazneen and Tilo, Jasmine in Mukherjee’s narrative also benefits from her displacement to the West. Although it has to be foregrounded here that unlike Nazneen and Tilo, who become financially empowered in Western cities, in the case of Jasmine, not only cities, for example, New York City, help her achieve financial independence, but smaller towns in Iowa and Florida also become significant sites where she becomes empowered. In contrast to Jasmine’s situation in India, where she has been at the mercy of her father and two brothers, Mukherjee’s protagonist fulfils her dream in America: “Iowa [is] a state where miracles still [happen]” (Mukherjee 197). Even though Jasmine, at first, finds America “humiliating” and “disappointing” (Mukherjee 29), she becomes more empowered and financially stable in this country. After she meets Sukhwinder, the murderer of her husband, in a park in New York City, Jasmine runs away to Iowa. There she gets a job in a bank:

[She begs] a potato-faced woman behind the widest, cleanest counter for a job,
any job (telling her that [she] would do whatever needed doing, the psychiatric

²⁰After Tilo is kidnapped from her village by the pirates, she manages to escape from their clutches and finds herself on an enchanted island. On that island, she is given a new name, “Tilottama,” and tutored by the First Mother about the origin, smell, and significance of different spices (Divakaruni 3).

ward, the deathwatch, anything, because [she is] desperate and [she doesn't] know anyone in Iowa), and the next minute a woman with the curtness and directness of Lillian Gordan, only older, tapped [her] on the shoulder and said, '[She] needs a meal as well as a job'. (Mukherjee 196)

In Iowa, Jasmine not only gets a job, she also acquires a family of her own: she is pregnant with her fiancé's child and they also adopt a son. In fact, it is not only in Iowa where Mukherjee's heroine gets a job, but people at each location in the US where she traverses, help her achieve a degree of financial freedom. For instance, in Florida, Jasmine resides at Lillian Gordan's place and works there; in New York City, she works as a caregiver at Taylor's and Wylie's, and finally, in Iowa she gets a job in a bank.

Therefore, although it is clear that participation in the neoliberal market economy is a compromise, female protagonists become more empowered in Western cities which are governed by neoliberal economics and politics. These cities promise their citizens "the liberty and near-equality of movement and opportunity in exchange for their concession to the liberality of markets" (Zeigler 154). Even though working in neoliberal cities can often be called mere exploitation, which is portrayed in Ali's later novel, *In the Kitchen*²¹ in detail, the diasporic novels I have analysed offer more optimistic conclusions.²² Despite the fact that female protagonists often begin their journeys to the West as accompanying spouses of male characters, the neoliberal cities provide entrepreneurial freedom to them. Furthermore, besides financial necessity, it is individual initiative that enables the main characters to engage in the free-market economy in the host nation and thus become more emancipated.

6. Conclusion

The first chapter of my dissertation has investigated the impact of Western neoliberal cities on the identity formation of South Asian diasporic characters. While the male characters, for example, Chanu in *Brick Lane* and Ashoke in *The Namesake*, have moved

²¹Ali's novel, *In the Kitchen*, depicts immigrant communities, which include "mainly recently arrived individuals from areas on the globe such as Eastern Europe or Africa, often with little historical connection with the British empire. This means they are culturally and linguistically distant not only from Britain, but also from the ethnic groups which migrated there after the Second World War from the British ex colonies" (Rodriguez 55). Exploring the extent to which exploitation of immigrants is "still a common occurrence" (Rodriguez 56), Saskia Sassen points out that "the corporate economy characteristic of twenty-first century society, whose greatest concentrations can be found in major Western cities, requires large concentrations of workers devoted to lowly paid unprofessional and manual jobs and these are often held by women and migrants who are usually ignored and excluded from economic representation" (Sassen 170).

²²Narratives that expose the hardships of precarious migrants in London, such as Zadie Smith's *The Embassy of Cambodia* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* for instance, tell a very different story.

away from their home countries in search of jobs and for educational purposes, their female counterparts have accompanied them in order to support their families. I have explained with the help of Wise and Márquez that the economic pressures experienced by the diasporic characters, that is, the lack of job opportunities in the home countries, forced them to migrate to the West. But the journey has not been an easy one because the privileged positions that most of the characters have enjoyed in the host nation have come with compromises on their part. Relying on the theories of Harvey, Huehls, Smith, Peck and Tickell, I have discussed the concept of neoliberalism and its relevance in the diasporic context. The free-market tradition in neoliberal cities provides an opportunity for the female characters to work in the host culture. Han's theory has helped me understand that individual freedom, which diasporic women enjoy in the West to some extent, is an illusion, and the liberty that the neoliberal cities provide is deceptive. This is because, as I have argued, the diasporic characters are ultimately constrained by the policy of the market economy: their choices are limited. Furthermore, the arguments of Györke, Pinson and Journal have enabled me to explore why Western cities, for example, London, New York City and San Francisco, are significant locations in the world economy and how they contribute to the formation of identities.

My chapter has also discussed the notion of cosmopolitanism. I have traced the development of cosmopolitanism in the neoliberal urban locations relying on the theories of Appadurai and Bhabha. While Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism has been criticised because of his Eurocentric bias, Appadurai has claimed that cosmopolitanism needs to be understood in a wider, non-Eurocentric context. Drawing on Bhabha's theory, which divides immigrants into global and vernacular cosmopolitanism, I have argued that some of the South Asian diasporic characters are vernacular cosmopolitans since their stories offer alternatives to mainstream cosmopolitan models. These vernacular cosmopolitans are different from Kant's notion of elite cosmopolitans since they belong to the lower strata of the society, as the story of Nazneen, Tilo, and Jasmine show, for instance. Through the close readings of the literary narratives, I have shown that the neoliberal cities serve as a refuge to the diasporic female characters, which help them leave the patriarchal norms of their home countries behind. For instance, the main characters of Ali, Divakaruni, and Mukherjee have been victims of social and political oppressions in their home countries, but after displacement they have gained agency in the host nation. Participation in the neoliberal market economy, then, can be read both as exploitation and as a subversive gesture, since financial independence helps these protagonists overthrow the conventional norms of their home cultures, which consign them to

the private sphere. The literary narratives I have analysed also show how neoliberalism has normalised work from home, thus ironically becoming complicit with the patriarchal traditions of the protagonists' home countries. For example, Nazneen is sewing garments from her apartment and Tilo is working in the spice store, which is also her home. Nevertheless, both protagonists gradually become more empowered in the narratives. Despite the compromises they have to make in Western metropolises, they acquire a more stable position in society.

CHAPTER 2

“Places and Spaces”: Transformative Perspectives in Diasporic Narratives

1. Introduction

The migrant characters move from their native countries to the West as they desire to attain freedom, opportunity, and material comfort. As I have discussed in the “Introduction,” the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 in the US has fostered large-scale immigration from Asia. In contrast to the “pre-1965 immigrants, Asian Indian predecessors, who were largely agricultural and unskilled labourers” (Williams 8), the post-1965 group of immigrants were educated and were higher in their socio-economic status (Williams 8). In the immigration history of the South Asian diasporic community, England is also considered to be one of the most desired destinations (Bentley 17). As Elleke Boehmer argues, after the Second World War, London became the central focus of immigration with its “secularist, anarchist, socialist, avant-garde, and freethinking circles...thus [forming] an important meeting ground for Indian, Irish, African, and Caribbean freedom movements” (Boehmer 20). Post-Second World War migration to the UK and the US has gradually altered the population of these countries, resulting in the growth of ethnic minorities in Britain and in America.

This large-scale migration inevitably contributed to the making of societies which can be called multicultural. The concept of multiculturalism is often equated with “an essentialized notion of ethnicity in which “everybody secure with his or her own ethnic group is competing with other ethnic groups on a hierarchy for resources”” (Drew 171). A number of critics, such as Stuart Hall, call attention to this essentialism and question the ideology of happy multiculturalism. Hall claims that multiculturalism is “far from being a settled doctrine...[it] is a deeply contested idea” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 97). Highlighting the “significance of cultural diversity,” he further argues that it needs to be “publicly” manifested and “the contributions of people of colour [should be integrated] into the fabric of society” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 98). Questioning the idea that migrants need to be integrated seamlessly into the host culture, critics call attention to the need to rethink the very concept of home and inclusion. Susheila Nasta, for instance, points out that “the walls of Britain as ‘island nation’ have consistently been eroded and reconfigured by the uncovering of a more permeable and diasporic geography, a geography which both contradicts and complicates the comfortable nationalist binaries of home and abroad” (Nasta 3). Exploring the notion of

inclusion and acceptance, Kathleen Hall claims that “[t]he cultural politics of nation formation is the battlefield upon which immigrants and their children fight for inclusion [when they attempt] to shift the boundaries of belonging” (Hall, K. 114). Similar struggles of the immigrants for inclusion in the host nation are depicted in all the literary and the cinematic narratives that I analyse.

When the diasporic women are away from their homeland, they recreate and practice traditions and rituals related to their home culture, transforming Western urban locations into spaces that exhibit a version of their native “home.” Relying on Jon Anderson’s, Michel de Certeau’s and Doreen Massey’s theories on places and spaces, my chapter will analyse how diasporic female characters transform confining places into empowering spaces. I argue that the Western geographical locations become sites where the remodelling is performed through various strategies, such as mimicry and parody, which I read as acts of subversion. Finally, Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity will help me point out that during the process of transformation of confining locations, female protagonists also redefine their identities and acquire a hybrid, more empowering sense of self by the end of the narratives. Moreover, it has to be foregrounded that the integration of the main characters into the host culture is not always seamless and not all protagonists seek a hybrid identity. There are exceptions among the characters, for example, Mukherjee’s heroine, Jasmine, who does not want to keep traces of her native culture in America, and Lahiri’s protagonist, Mrs. Sen, who finds it difficult to accept the cultural norms of the host nation. I will discuss these issues in detail in this chapter.

2. “Places” and “Spaces”

The South Asian diasporic female characters, as the selected narratives I explore portray, are in constant flux. The literary and the cinematic texts not only trace their displacements from the homeland to the host nation, but they also highlight their journey towards and within Western neoliberal cities. In the narratives I analyse, cities such as London in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Boston in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, San Francisco in Chitra Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*, and New York City in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* have a significant impact on the protagonists’ identities and are also appropriated by their subversive practices. From the perspective of cultural geography,

places²³ are the sites where “cultural activities happen in particular ways in particular contexts” (Anderson, First Edition 6). In other words, when diasporic subjects are in the host nation, their places of residence become the breeding ground where the interchange of culture takes place. These places are “made by intersections of culture and context” (Anderson, First Edition 6), as Anderson points out: different cultures contribute to place making depending on local context. Highlighting the flexibility of places, Anderson argues that “[a]s actions and ideas change over time, places become dynamic states of transition” (Anderson, First Edition 8), and thus, they are “not fixed” (Anderson, First Edition 8). Furthermore, the places are “constituted by imbroglis of traces,” which are “marks, residues or remnants left in place by cultural life” (Anderson, First Edition 5). These traces are “constantly produced” and thus they contribute to the “meanings and identity of places” (Anderson, First Edition 5). By preserving their cultural traditions within the host nation, I argue, diasporic women interconnect the eastern and the western places, which can be read as an example of translocal connectedness²⁴ (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 8).

Probing further into the concept of place, Doreen Massey argues that places depend “crucially on the notion of articulation” (Massey 8), suggesting that places are sites where the construction of identities as well as the differences between the subjects can be recognised. To understand places, the “construction of the subjects within them” is to be taken into account as they are “part and parcel” of those places and participate in the identity formation of the places (Massey 8). If places are considered to be the sites where subjects and their culture intersect, then spaces are “where culture is lived” (Anderson, Second Edition 51). Massey defines space as the “realm of the dead or the chaos of simultaneity and multiplicity” (Massey 1), suggesting that, on the one hand, spaces can be fixed with meanings, but, on the other, “n-dimensional” (Massey 1) identity, or, in other words, multiple identities, can coexist in spaces. Massey’s notion of space relies on Henri Lefebvre’s concepts, who differentiates space and place as follows: “Spaces...are ‘empty abstractions’ whilst places are ‘drenched in

²³From the geographical perspective, place is “the absolute location,” the grid references that is attached to the “portions of the earth’s surface by conventional latitudinal and longitudinal positioning” (Withers 639). To understand the co-existence of culture and geography in a place, I rely on Jon Anderson’s argument that “any place or area, at any scale, or in any circumstance, could be thought about as a geographical context” (Anderson, First Edition 3). He further claims that “geographical contexts can exist whenever there are human (and non-human) activities; the trick is to acknowledge them, work out what produces them, and what effect they have” (Anderson, First Edition 3). In my dissertation, I will use the terms geographical place and geographical location to refer to the physical characteristics of a location.

²⁴I will elaborate on the concept of “translocality” in the following paragraphs.

cultural meaning’...Spaces are scientific, open, and detached; places are intimate, peopled, emotive” (Anderson, Second Edition 51). In other words, “geographical space becomes place when human beings imbue it with meaning” (Anderson, Second Edition 52), as Anderson puts it: “places are humanised versions of space” (Anderson, Second Edition 51). Thus, as argued by Lefebvre, Massey and Anderson the culture of the subjects becomes a significant aspect in the construction of places.

However, I would propose slightly different reading of place and space. While it is evident from my selected texts that places are saturated with cultural connotations, in my reading, spaces are not entirely “empty abstraction[s],” “detached” (Anderson, Second Edition 51) from meaning. In defining the concept of space, I rely on Michel de Certeau’s theory, which has been particularly influential in the humanities. According to de Certeau, the individual spaces are “practised” places (de Certeau 117), suggesting that places are transformed into spaces when individuals appropriate them. Spaces are “composed of intersections of mobile elements” (de Certeau 117) and occur as the “effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function” (de Certeau 117). One of these operations is the act of saturating space with meanings related to the home culture of the protagonists, as I will show in this chapter. It is my contention that the delimiting places are transformed into “spaces of enunciation” (de Certeau 98) in narratives such as *Brick Lane* and *Jasmine*, for instance, or, in other words, into a space which diasporic women appropriate through acts of subversion.

While female characters transform places into spaces through subversive acts, their identities are also impacted by these locations. Emphasising the interconnectedness of place²⁵ and identity, Jon Anderson uses the term “scale” to determine how the “sense of place” is developed (Anderson, First Edition 119). According to him, scales can be divided into two broad categories: the local and the national (Anderson, First Edition 119). The local scale is “the most immediate and the most obvious” (Anderson, First Edition 119) level. This scale defines both the self and the place (Anderson, First Edition 119). In contrast to the “direct,” “face-to-face” form of interaction of the local scale, the national scale is an “alternative (b)ordering mechanism [that is] needed to re-place us” (Anderson, First Edition 120).

²⁵Anderson claims that places can be considered “at a range of scales” (Anderson, First Edition 38). He further suggests that place can also refer to “one’s favourite chair, a room or building, increasing to one’s country or even continent” (Anderson, First Edition 38).

Anderson claims that it is not possible to know everyone at the national scale due to the lack of direct communication, as a result of which an alternative mechanism is required to reposition the individuals. Relying on his theory, I argue that the identities of diasporic women are redefined based on the people they meet at different scales. In order to understand the sense of belonging of diasporic subjects, I rely on Anderson's notion of how the sense of a place is produced at various geographical scales. In the process of their displacement, diasporic women are detached from their local environment, that is, the villages or cities they come from, and integrate into the traditions of the host country at the national and, most importantly, local scale. Exploring the significance of translocal²⁶ connections, Györke argues that "the national is not the only spatial border that is relevant: differences between the country and the city, the suburban and the urban as well as neighbourhoods also have to be explored, among many other local variations" (Györke, "From Transnational to Translocal" 9). The places in the West symbolise the scales where "cultures, communities, and people root themselves and give themselves definition" (Anderson, Second Edition 51). As the diasporic female characters uproot and re-root themselves in the narratives I analyse, they come in contact with several cultures which are different from their native traditions, and which have an impact on their identities. In the following sub-sections, I will show how the protagonists transform the individual places they inhabit at various scales, such as the kitchen, the seaside, as well as buses and shops, among other locations, into subversive spaces, and how their identities are redefined in the process. But before that I will return to Bhabha's notion of hybridity in order to explore how the urban locations can be transformed into ambivalent spaces according to his theory.

3. Formation of Ambivalent Spaces: Homi Bhabha's Hybridity

The term "hybridity" refers to the intermingling of species and races, but from the cultural aspect, it can be understood as "contrafusion and disjunction" as well as "fusion and assimilation" (Young 16). In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie, whose writings had an impact on Bhabha's theory, interprets hybridity as a "transfusion of cultural identities" (Rushdie 394), which calls for a celebration of "impurity [and] intermingling" (Rushdie 394). He calls this fusion "mongrelization" (Rushdie 394). Through the process of hybridity, the diasporic female characters connect their home culture and host culture by intermingling the

²⁶Arjun Appadurai has used the expression translocality in 1996 to refer to "structure of feeling" (Appadurai 181). The concept sheds light on the "production and reproduction of locality, in which ties of marriage, work, business, and leisure weave together to create neighborhoods that belong in one sense to particular nation-states" (Appadurai 192).

traditions and customs in the narratives I read. As Rushdie argues, cultural translation is not a loss, rather, the term has a positive connotation: “It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained” (Rushdie 17). In my selected works, hybridity enables the female protagonists to create a new space within the host nation. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha defines hybridity as a “problematic...colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (Bhabha 162). Thus, for him, hybridity is a constant contestation (Bhabha 325), which, similar to mimicry, challenges the authenticity of hegemonic Western cultures. This makes it evident that diasporic characters have the power to intervene into the cultural norms of the host country through various subversive strategies.

To understand the intermingling of home and host culture, as represented in the cinematic narratives of Gurinder Chadha, E. Ann Kaplan points out the following: a woman filmmaker who is herself a bearer of hybrid identity²⁷ “seek[s] to intervene in the imaginary – to change how images are produced – rather than to present minorities²⁸ as ‘they really are’” (Kaplan 219). Both *Bend it like Beckham* and *Bhaji on the Beach* explore the ways in which displacement has an impact on the transformation of traditional cultures, that is, Indian cultural practices, and the cultural clash that has results due to emigration to the UK. The diasporic space in the host nation acts as the “point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested” (Brah 205). Throughout Chadha’s narratives, her female characters experience the constant flux of

²⁷Similar to her female characters in both narratives, Gurinder Chadha is a South Asian diasporic female in the UK: a British-Asian film director. Chadha was born in Nairobi and when she was two years old her family moved to Southall, England “looking for a better economic prospect: the father as a banker and the mother as a shop tender” (Sánchez 42). With her background as a second-generation Indian living in Britain, she has “recognised the racism imposed by the British white-normativity” (Sánchez 42). *Bend it like Beckham* and *Bhaji on the Beach* are autobiographical works of Gurinder Chadha, as they not only trace the migratory experiences of the South Asians, but they also represent “how different generations of British Asian women [face] the daily routines of racism and patriarchal domination” (Sánchez 43).

²⁸When Gurinder Chadha’s father arrived in England, he and many other Afro-Caribbean immigrants were “‘very welcome to do all the grotty jobs the British didn’t want to do’. [Chadha’s] father, who had worked as a clerical officer in Barclays Bank in Kenya, applied for the same job in London and was laughed at because he had a beard and turban, which simply wouldn’t do if he were to serve English customers. He had to take work instead as a postman and a gas man before buying a shop and setting up the family business, which provided the family with an economic toehold” (Koshy and Chadha 148).

cultural inclusion and exclusion as they retain their own cultural traditions and challenge British norms and conventions at one and the same time.

To probe further into the concept of hybridity, I turn to the theories of Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński. These critics define hybridity as the juxtaposition of “two distinct cultural traditions” in “time and/or space leading to situational code switching and the hybridization that occurs from the mixing of difference and the production of the new” (Barker and Galasiński 159). However, in the formation of a new cultural tradition there remains a problem as “it assumes or implies the meeting or mixing of completely separate and homogeneous cultural spheres” (Barker and Galasiński 159). Highlighting the non-homogeneity of cultures, Barker and Galasiński point out that

[t]o think of British-Asian or Italian-Australian hybrid forms as the mixing of two separate traditions is problematic because neither British, Italian nor Australian cultures are bounded and homogeneous. Each category is always already a hybrid form which is also divided along the lines of religion, class, gender, age, nationality and so forth. (Barker and Galasiński 159)

Similar problems can be observed in the diasporic narratives, especially among the first-generation immigrants. For example, Ashima, Nazneen and Mrs. Sen find it difficult to identify themselves as “American,” “British,” “Asian,” “British-Asian” or “American-Asian.” Exploring the dilemma faced by British Asians, Michael Giardina points out that “even on a general level, a multilayer schism exists between Asians born in Britain and those who have emigrated from South Asia” (Giardina 29). To elaborate further on the conflict between “British” and “English” identification vis-a-vis “Asians,” Giardina quotes Tariq Modood: “while many Asians have come to think of themselves as hyphenated Brits, few yet think of themselves as English” (qtd. in Giardina 29-30). While the elder women, such as Ashima, Mrs. Sen and Nazneen, are still coming to terms with their ambiguous positions in multicultural America and Britain, the teenagers, for example, Gogol and Moushumi in *The Namesake*, Sahana in *Brick Lane*, Jess in *Bend in like Beckham*, and Ladhu and Madhu in *Bhaji on the Beach* fully embrace Western culture and refuse the cultural traditions of their parents.

The identity of the South Asian diasporic women, which is formed in the hybrid space, is usually a dual and “mongrel” (Rushdie 394) identity, to use Rushdie’s phrase. This double identity is also known as “hyphenated” identity. A “hyphen” is used to conjoin “two words

[and] form a compound term where each word receives equal stress” (Chakraborty 27). In the case of diasporic identities, this hyphen signifies a “hybrid and multicultural identity” (Chakraborty 27), which retains the “unique cultural values and heritage” (Chakraborty 27) of the host nation. In my reading, the new identity that is acquired by the female characters, especially the first-generation women, is an ambivalent hybrid identity. Though there are exceptions. For instance, Ashima and Nazneen are comfortable with their hyphenated identities, but, on the other hand, while Jasmine considers herself to be an American, Mrs. Sen refuses to be identified with the host culture. In tracing the cultural roots of immigrants, Brah points out that the relationship of the first-generation to the place where they have migrated is “different from that of the subsequent generations, mediated [...] by memories of what [they have] recently left behind [as well as] by the experiences of disruption and displacement as [they try] to reorientate, to form new social networks, and [learn] to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities” (Brah 190). Thus, there is a significant difference between the way first- and second-generation characters relate to the host nation, which is mainly due to the generational gap and their place of origin. In the following subsection, I will discuss the ways in which transnational identities are formed in this hybrid space.

4. Diaspora Space and Transnational Identities

In the flux between “home” and “exile,” the diasporic female characters tend to create an in-between space between the two worlds, which is akin to Bhabha’s notion of third space. This diasporic space, as Brah argues, is the “intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (Brah 205). This in-betweenness, nevertheless, involves privileges, which writers, such as Jhumpa Lahiri, has acknowledged in an interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth, which Rohina Ratti and Gunjan Aggarwal document in their work: “I am lucky that I’m between two worlds...I don’t really know what a distinct South Asian identity means” (qtd. in Ratti and Aggarwal 546). Similar to Lahiri, Chadha has also talked about the benefits of having a multicultural identity in an interview with Susan Koshy. She described the most inspiring features of the diasporic experience as follows:

What excites me about the diaspora...is the idea of not being easily categorized, not being labeled, and not feeling that I am fixed in some way to any one given cultural, political or national framework...It’s very liberating because I am not

tied to any one physical land now or any one dominant type of community, so I am at liberty to reconstruct it as I go along. (Koshy and Chadha 156)

The same flexibility is represented through the female protagonists in their narratives: characters do not remain limited to strict conventional codes and each of them is provided a space, similar to the Bhabhaian “Third Space” (Bhabha 53), where they can construct and reconstruct an identity of their own which enables them to become transnational²⁹ agents. They are “routinely mobile, maintaining transnational ties with their country of origin” (Paudyal 200), and “their positionality de-territorializes the specific national and cultural identities” (Paudyal 200), suggesting that individuals cannot remain confined within narrow boundaries in the “globalized world characterized by transculturation and migration” (Paudyal 200). For instance, as opposed to Ashima in *The Namesake*, who continues to sustain a connection between India and the US, Moushumi crosses national and cultural boundaries in search of an identity that helps her to be seen as a citizen of the Western world: when she is in Paris, she “doesn’t want to be mistaken for a tourist in the city” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 234). Though the narrative does not provide further details of her life in Paris, yet her plan to move suggests that she is looking for a different identity, which is a European, cosmopolitan one.

Exploring the concept of identity as a result of the interconnectedness of the modern world, Arjun Appadurai uses the concept of “scapes”³⁰ (Appadurai 33), with the help of which he studies transnationalism. This concept is also used to explore the “changing social, territorial, and cultural formation of group identity, in which people regroup in new locations and reconstruct their histories and identities far from their origin” (Paudyal 200-01). To unite on the basis of their shared culture and ethnicity is a way of survival for diasporic people, away from their homeland. We can observe similar tendencies in the narratives I analyse. In Lahiri’s novel, for instance, migrants from the same country turn to each other for practical and emotional support: “They all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are

²⁹Transnationalism, in general terms, refers to migrants’ durable ties across countries and, more widely, it captures not only communities but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations (Faist 9). Transnational migrants are those individuals who maintain or build multiple networks or connections between their country of origin and the country of their settlement. These group of individuals, often from former colonies or old countries of the Third World, form transnational communities, and they migrate in search of employment to the countries at the edge of the “industrialised and tertiarised” (Bruneau 43) world of the North’s major powers (US, Canada, Western Europe, Japan) (Bruneau 43).

³⁰According to Appadurai, there is a global cultural economy which can be understood in terms of the interconnectedness and interaction of “five dimensions of global cultural flows”: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples (Appadurai 33).

friends...The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 38). The identities these migrants form are both “local” and “global,” reflecting “networks of transnational identification encompassing ‘imagined’ and ‘encountered communities’” (Brah 192). In my understanding, Brah’s notion of “imagined communities” (Brah 192) is rather related to the home culture in which identifications are “forged within and out of a confluence of narratives from annals of collective memory and re-memory” (Brah 193). On the other hand, the term “encountered communities” (Brah 192) refers to a “matrix of economic, political and cultural inter-relationships which construct the commonality between the various components of a dispersed group” (Brah 193) in the host country. For instance, in the US, Ashima not only remains confined within her group of Bengali families, she also makes American friends in the library where she works: “She is friendly with the other women who work at the library, most of them also with grown children. A number of them live alone, as Ashima does now, because they are divorced” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 162). Thus, Lahiri’s protagonist reconstructs an identity “far from [her] place of origin” (Paudyal 201), which can be called transnational.

Highlighting the impact of Western urban locations on the lives of diasporic people, Robin Field claims that the geographical place acts as “a liminal space of cultural borderlands” between home and host countries, which creates confusion and temporary tension (Field 166). As Field points out, for the second-generation the cultural borderland refers to the transition between their country of birth and their parents’ country of origin. This cultural borderland is not merely a place which witnesses dilemmas regarding diasporic identity formation, but it is also a space that can be read as an ambivalent hybrid site, that is, “a synthesized position resolving the dialectic of two cultures” (Childs and Williams 134). I will explore the specific features of this hybrid site in detail in the next section of my dissertation, analysing how diasporic identities are formed and transformed in diaspora space.

5. Division of Locations in the Diasporic Narratives

To analyse the process of transformation at each geographical scale, I have divided the places in the narratives I explore into different categories: private, public, vehicular³¹, and transitory locations. When the diasporic characters move from their home countries to the

³¹I use the term “vehicular” on the basis of Hengameh Saroukhani’s concept “vehicular cosmopolitanism” (Saroukhani 11) to refer to the interiors of vehicles, such as buses and cars. I will elaborate on the term later in this chapter in the subsection titled “The Interiors of Vehicles”.

host nation, they leave one set of local and national scales behind and acquire another on both scales. For example, Nazneen moves from Dhaka, Bangladesh and arrives at Tower Hamlets, Britain. The primary aim of the sub-divisions that I am going to discuss in the following paragraphs is to show how spaces and places at each scale have an impact on the identities of the female characters.

5.1. Private Locations

Diasporic identity is not derived from “some internalized history,” rather, it is attained “precisely from the specificity of its interactions with the ‘outside’” (Massey 169). In other words, diasporic identity is constructed out of “positive interrelations” “beyond the boundaries” (Massey 169) of one’s private realm at various locations in the host city, through interpersonal relationships and new customs, to name a few. Even when diasporic women are in the West, they try to preserve their native traditions, as it is represented through the acts of Ashima, Nazneen, Mrs. Sen and Mrs. Bhamra. These first-generation characters spend most of their time in the house. Therefore, I will begin my analysis with the private spaces, such as the living room and the kitchen, where these women primarily live and navigate, and will investigate how they contest these confining locations.

The very opening scene of Lahiri’s novel, for instance, portrays the protagonist, Ashima, standing in the kitchen of her Centre Square apartment, recreating a Calcutta snack: “combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilli pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 1). Similar to Ashima, Nazneen and Mrs. Sen are also represented mostly as working in the kitchen. For instance, in Lahiri’s “Mrs. Sen’s,” the main character is obsessed with meal preparation: “Eventually she went to the kitchen and returned to the living room with the blade, an eggplant, and some newspapers” (Lahiri, “Mrs Sen’s” 133). In my reading, though places such as the kitchen and the living room appear to be confining, the locations where female characters cook, eat and serve food become ambivalent spaces, akin to Bhabha’s “Third Space” (Bhabha 53) in Lahiri’s narratives. The sofa in Mrs Sen’s apartment is “draped at all times with a green and black bedcover printed with rows of elephants bearing palanquins on their backs” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 115). In her kitchen, “[b]rimming bowls and colanders [line] the countertop, spices and pastes [are] measured and blended, and eventually a collection of broths [simmer] over periwinkle flames on the stove” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 117). Drawing on Bhabha’s notion of “third space,” I believe that the

way in which the kitchen and the living room in Mrs. Sen's US apartment are portrayed "ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 55). The juxtaposition of her home cultural traditions and the host cultural norms makes it evident that "even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). Thus, the living room and the kitchen not only symbolise a meeting ground where the characters' home culture clashes with the host culture, but Mrs. Sen also epitomizes her agency through her culinary performances.

The kitchen also appears in *Bend it like Beckham*: the film portrays the protagonist practising her football skills with vegetables in the kitchen instead of following her mother's instructions to cook proper Indian food. Jess' practice in the kitchen can be read as an instance of self-reflection,³² which concerns her native traditions. Mrs. Bhamra's understanding of an ideal woman is based on her ability to cook proper Punjabi food. Jess, nevertheless, challenges this view: "Anyone can cook aloo gobi.³³ But who can bend a ball like Beckham?" (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 0:23:15). In the narrative, aloo gobi is represented as a "symbol of how ingredients making up an individual's identity encompass numerous 'flavours'" (May 251). With the use of the metaphor of aloo gobi, the film hints at the hybrid and "in-between identity" (Bhabha 26) of the protagonist and the struggles she faces as she attempts to maintain both the customs of her Punjabi community and live for her passion, which is football.

Similar to the kitchen, the interiors of the flats also prove to be confining locations in *Brick Lane* and *The Namesake*. For example, the suffocating emotional condition of the protagonist is highlighted through the description of the interior of the apartment in Lahiri's novel: "The apartment is drafty during winter, and in summer, intolerably hot. The thick glass windowpanes are covered by dreary dark brown curtains. There are even roaches in the bathroom...But she has complained of none of this. She has kept her disappointment to herself, not wanting to offend Ashoke, or worry her parents" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 30). As Ashima does not want to bother her husband about the condition of the apartment, Nazneen, too, keeps her worries to herself. The narrative portrays her mostly inside the house, sitting

³²In the following sections of this chapter, I will analyse how the female characters perform acts of subversion: either by mimicking the host cultural traditions, which is akin to Bhabha's notion of mimicry, or, with the help of parody, which I read as a subversion of the patriarchal norms of their home culture. See page 63.

³³"Aloo gobi" is a Hindi term which means potato-cauliflower. It is a traditional Indian vegetarian dish which is made into a curry with potato, cauliflower, and spices.

by the window, waving at the tattoo lady (Ali, *Brick Lane* 17). Feeling suffocated in the house in Brick Lane, she always dreams of the open fields of Bangladesh: “Nazneen fell asleep on the sofa. She looked out across jade-green rice fields and swam in the cool dark lake. She walked arm-in-arm to school with Hasina...And heaven, which was above, was wide and empty and the land stretched out ahead” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 21). These episodes show that in the beginning of the narratives, both Ashima and Nazneen succumb to the pressure of being good, faithful wives, who, despite their discomforts, do not complain. But by the end of the narratives, their transformation is evident as they prioritise their desires and make their decisions accordingly: after Ashoke’s demise, Ashima divides her stay between Calcutta and America, and Nazneen refuses to return to Bangladesh with her husband. I have argued that the interiors of the apartments are not only confining locations in the geographical sense, which symbolise the patriarchal norms of the home countries, for example, the belief that women should be in the house and take care of the family, but they are also ambivalent third spaces at one and the same time. I believe the suffocation that the protagonists experience in the beginning of the narratives is primarily due to the societal expectations related to their native traditions. But eventually, as represented in the novels, these female characters transform private interiors into empowering “third spaces”: for instance, while Ashima single-handedly “manages an assembly line of preparation” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 274) for her guests in her Boston apartment, Nazneen works from home in a garment business in London.

Not unlike other narratives which explore how apparently confining places are transformed into empowering locations, Bharati Mukherjee’s novel also highlights the ways in which private locations are appropriated. The house of Lillian Gordan, the first woman who helps Jasmine after her arrival in America, is an example of this appropriation. At her place Jasmine learns to “talk and walk” (Mukherjee 133) like Americans. Lillian’s place becomes the first site where she encounters American culture. Later, at Taylor’s and Wylie’s house in New York City, where Jasmine works as a caregiver for their daughter, her encounter with the marine iguana is yet another significant cultural experience: “Truly I had been reborn. Indian village girls do not hold large reptiles on their laps” (Mukherjee 163). Besides her unique experience with the marine iguana, Jasmine feels she is ready to embrace the host culture at Taylor’s and Wylie’s place due to her positive impressions. As she asserts, “I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family” (Mukherjee 165).

Thus, Lillian's house and Taylor's and Wylie's dormitory are significant locations for Mukherjee's heroine where she experiences a sense of empowerment.

Although Jasmine is helped by people such as Lillian and Taylor, American people do not seem to see and acknowledge her cultural difference: they either attempt to Americanise her or treat her as an exotic being in the novel. At Bud's place in Iowa, for instance, she is seen as a dark and mysterious being, not unlike Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*: "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am" (Mukherjee 200). I argue that Jasmine identifies with the orientalist image that is projected on her. This signifies that she is put into a ready-made category in the host nation and becomes confined and constrained by these orientalist images. As Iwona Filipczak points out, "Mukherjee employs the Orientalist gaze, and so throughout her new life in America, the narrator is constantly perceived as 'the Other,' as the incarnation of the colonial stereotype of the female native" (Filipczak 125). Drawing on Filipczak's argument, I claim that Jasmine, similar to Tilo, fulfils a need in American society, and her perceived exoticism is the result of stereotyping.

In my reading, however, the eastern references in Divakaruni's and Mukherjee's novels do not simply suggest that their protagonists are exoticised in America. Images related to "darkness" and "mystery" (Mukherjee 200) in *Jasmine* allude to the Hindu goddess, Kali,³⁴ who is seen as the goddess of time, darkness, and mystery. The origin of this goddess can be traced "to the deities of the village, tribal, and mountain cultures of South Asia who were gradually appropriated and transformed, if never quite tamed, by the Sanskrit traditions" ("Kali"). According to Hindu mythology, Kali has slayed the demon "Raktabija" ("Blood-Seed") ("Kali") in order to destroy evil and restore peace. I would like to argue that in Mukherjee's narrative, even though Jasmine is portrayed as an exotic character, her "otherness" is not simply the result of exoticisation in American society, but also due to the assertion of her cultural and religious traditions in the novel. Like the goddess Kali who slayed the demon, Jasmine, too, is untamed: she murders Half-Face, the Captain who rapes her. The transformation of her identity also echoes Massey's notion that "'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places" (Massey 121). Her

³⁴Kali: (Sanskrit: "She Who Is Black" or "She Who Is Death"), in Hinduism she is the "goddess of time, doomsday, and death, or the black goddess" ("Kali").

identity changes with the change in narrative settings, the people she interacts with, and thus, she acquires multiple identities. In other words, Jasmine not only transforms the enclosed interiors of the apartments, for instance, Lillian's, Taylor's and Bud's houses, into empowering spaces, but her identity is also based on native cultural traditions which, despite the exoticization she experiences in the United States, mark her as an untamed and unfixed being.

Another private location in Mukherjee's novel is the motel room, where Jasmine spends her first night in America. Though motels are public locations, the particular room that Half-Face, the Captain of the ship on which she has sailed to Florida, books for the night, can be read as a private one: this is because, the motel room conceals the violence that the protagonist experiences. This room is associated with instability, cheapness, and impermanence: "No one to call to, no one to disturb us. Just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had murdered. The room looked liked a slaughterhouse" (Mukherjee 119). After the captain sexually exploits her, she murders him by slitting his throat with a blade. I would claim that the act of murder, however problematic, signifies that she is becoming an empowered woman who is able to defend herself. At this point, she sheds the idea that women should suffer molestation silently and embraces a darker part of her identity, associated with Kali's rebellious and powerful nature: "My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for" (Mukherjee 121). The fact that Jasmine becomes a murderer is problematic, which shows that she has no legitimate tools to fight violence, but at the same time her act of murder is an act of self-defence because by murdering her rapist she survives the tragedy: "[she walks] out the front drive of the motel to the highway and [begins her] journey, travelling light" (Mukherjee 121). Even though her journey in America begins as a victim of molestation, later in the narrative she becomes a professional caregiver and also a mother. By the end of the novel, she walks out with her unborn child to accompany Taylor, the man she loves. Therefore, for the protagonist, embracing the darker aspects of her identity, which metaphorically takes place inside the motel room, is necessary in order to become empowered.

Based on the analysis of the narratives, it is clear that the apparently private locations, such as the kitchen, the living room, and the motel room, are not confining at all. Rather, these places become empowering spaces where the protagonists gain agency. As I have shown, Ashima, Nazneen and Mrs. Sen, who are mostly depicted within the four-walls of their houses, become empowered women as they utilise the kitchen space to display their

culinary skills. On the other hand, Jess, in Chadha's film, transforms the kitchen space into a meeting ground, where her home cultural traditions, for example, her mother's cooking lessons of Indian food, meet her passion for Western sport, that is, football. Similarly, Mukherjee's novel also traces the protagonist's gradual transformation as the narrative shifts from the motel room, where Jasmine murders her rapist, to Lillian's house, the place where she first encounters the host culture, followed by Taylor's place, where she works as a professional caregiver.

5.2. Public Locations

Apart from the often claustrophobic, private locations in the narratives, there are several public places, which have a significant impact on the identity formation of characters. These locations are rather diverse: the spice-shop in Divakaruni's novel, the library room in Lahiri's narrative, the football ground in Chadha's film, and the streets of the Western metropolises in most narratives I explore belong to this category. For example, in *The Mistress of Spices*, the primary location of the novel is the spice shop where the protagonist lives. According to one of the rules of the spices, mistresses are supposed to live in the spice shop, where they are magically placed, and they should not step outside the store. In Divakaruni's narrative, Tilo is placed in an Indian spice shop called "SPICE BAZAAR" (Divakaruni 4), which is situated at the "crooked corner of Esperanza where the Oakland buses hiss to stop" (Divakaruni 4). Although the spice shop is a public place where customers can step in, for Tilo, it is similar to a prison, where she is supposed to live as a mistress of the spices. The spices are personified in the narrative as they communicate with the mistress verbally and non-verbally: they "talk, sing, chide, love, warn and get annoyed with their mistresses. Alike human beings, every spice has its emotions, unique qualities, different voices and appearances" (Singh and Goswami 304). They also represent orthodox Indian patriarchy. As per their rules, a mistress is not allowed to touch other customers, she cannot step outside the spice shop and is forbidden to utilise the spices for her own purpose. But at the same time, the spices magically cure Tilo's customers. Deep down her heart, Tilo knows that she is nothing without the spices and her identity in the foreign land is based on her connection with them. With their support, she plays the role of a saviour, rescuing one of her customers, Geeta, from the arranged marriage set up by her family, and she also helps Ahuja's battered wife to deal with her domestic troubles. Despite her confinement, Tilo dares to violate the rules of the spices. She not only crosses the threshold of the shop, but also falls

in love with an American man, Raven, which is against the norms set by the spices. Therefore, on the one hand, the spices act as guardian figures for the protagonist, limiting her by native customs, but on the other hand, the very space of the shop becomes a site where the main character subverts these norms. She learns to maintain a balance between the customs of her home culture and the host nation, as by the end of the novel she chooses to remain the mistress of the spices yet also decides to live with the man she loves.

Unlike in Divakaruni's magic realist narrative, the grocery store in *Bhaji on the Beach* is not the primary setting of the film. However, it is an important location that sheds light on the transformation of the characters' identities. Chadha's film begins with an image of the grocery store where one of the elder women, Asha, works. Within this space, a Hindu god appears to her, who warns her about the duty of a typical Indian woman: "Asha know your place" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:02:10). Thereafter, the film portrays her husband, son and daughter demanding breakfast from her. The constant reminder about her duty bothers her, which makes her express her anger: "I went to college. My life was not meant to be like this...Duty, honour, sacrifice. What about me? I was a good singer at college...and I wasn't born selling newspapers" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:15:09). Though the film does not portray Asha's life before her marriage, perhaps she got married and moved to London since she had dreamt of becoming a singer and getting a better job than selling newspapers. Her unfulfilled desire can be a reason for the lack of support she shows towards the second-generation in the beginning of the film. But as the story proceeds, there is an evident change in her character. From a god-fearing person who vents out her distaste of Western culture, boasting that she has tried to teach her daughter "morals from back home" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:41:21), she gradually evolves into a person who supports³⁵ a second-generation female character, Ginder, to come out of her abusive marital relationship. Thus, Asha breaks the patriarchal norms imposed on a typical Indian wife, which is represented by the warnings of the Hindu God in the grocery store and becomes an open-minded and accommodating individual.

I have argued in the subsection on private locations that characters such as Ashima, Mrs. Sen and Nazneen are mostly seen inside apartments. Therefore, when these women step

³⁵In India, divorce is stigmatized by older generations. In case of a failed marriage, mostly the woman is blamed. Elder female members of the family advice the wife to make the relationship work. In case of a divorce, the woman is always looked down by the society.

out into the public realm, they search “for a gap” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 267) to connect with the outside world. In other words, the narratives suggest that the protagonists are provided with certain flexibility which give them the opportunity to challenge conventional codes and construct an identity that is more empowering than their home culture allows. To understand this flexibility let us look at the role the library and the conference room play in Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. For Ashima, who has always been financially dependent on her husband, working at a public library is a significant step in leaving the domestic realm: “It is Ashima’s first job in America, the first since before she was married. She signs her small pay-checks over to Ashoke” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 162). Similar to Ashima, who feels empowered at the library, Moushumi, too, “[reinvents] herself”³⁶ (Lahiri, *Namesake* 233) in the conference room in Paris. The experience helps her start living “a separate life” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 233) “without misgivings [and] without guilt” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 233). These experiences show that both first- and second-generation migrants are entitled to a degree of agency in the novel. Despite the generational gap, both characters redefine their identities and acquire a hybrid one as a result of becoming seen and recognised at public places in world cities such as Boston and Paris. This hybrid identity not only suggests that these women occupy an in-between position in the host nation, but it is also a constant reminder of the importance of the unique beliefs and norms that characterize these two worlds.

Besides the above mentioned public locations, the streets of the Western metropolises also play an important role in the transformations characters go through. Some examples include the streets of Cambridge in Lahiri’s *The Namesake* and that of London in Ali’s *Brick Lane*. To discuss the significance of walking in the city, I will rely on the concept of *flanerie*. Based on Charles Baudelaire’s and Walter Benjamin’s writings, Janet Wolff uses this term to discuss the practice of walking on the streets in Victorian Britain from a gender-conscious perspective³⁷. She argues that *flânerie* was a primarily male activity in the 19th century. (Wolff 6) She also points out that the term “*flaneuse*,” which refers to female walkers, can be used to describe older women in contemporary cities, as these women, in a certain sense, are “invisible” (Wolff 6) on the streets today. I am using the term *flaneuse* to refer to

³⁶In Paris, Moushumi’s “French friends adore her. Waiters and shopkeepers adore her. She both fits in perfectly yet remains slightly novel. Here Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 233).

³⁷Exploring the relationship between cities and women, Elizabeth Wilson argues that “[w]ith intensification of the public/private divide in the industrial period, the presence of women on the streets and in public places of entertainment caused enormous anxiety, and was the occasion for any number of moralising and regulatory discourses in the nineteenth century” (Wilson, “Invisible Flaneur” 72).

contemporary South Asian female characters walking on the streets of Western cities as they are often depicted as marginalized and invisible when passing in these “unmapped spaces” (Wolff 6) in the narratives. In *Brick Lane*, for instance, Nazneen feels she is invisible on the street: when she is walking “[w]ithout a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination (Ali, *Brick Lane* 56), people do not notice her: “But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 56). However, Nazneen is not only an invisible flaneuse, she becomes “a spectacle”³⁸ (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 189) in the novel because of her cultural differences. Therefore, Nazneen’s invisibility reveals how she feels in London, whereas the instance in which she become a spectacle suggest how she is seen in the West.

In the literary works that I analyse, the female protagonists “characteristically [appear] as marginal” (Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture* 86) in comparison to members of the host culture, though the intersectional³⁹ differences among the diasporic characters have to be taken into account when analysing their marginalization. As my analysis will show, the city streets become a “shifting space which can be appropriated by women” (Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture* 83) in the narratives I explore. Often the very practice of walking on the streets undisturbed is subversive in these texts due to the constraints female characters experience in the private realm. For example, in Ali’s novel, Nazneen’s husband does not encourage her to step outside the house: Chanu asks his wife: “Why should you go out?” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 45), suggesting that he prefers his wife to stay at home and attend to domestic duties.

City streets also play a significant role in *The Namesake*. For Lahiri’s protagonist, India, especially Calcutta, is a very special place. It is definitely her “home,” a place where she has her roots, while America is a foreign country for her. At the beginning of the narrative, Ashima struggles to come to terms with the differences between her homeland and the host nation, as if these two places were “disconnected entities, separate islands” (Kral 67) one could inhabit without being in contact with the inhabitants of the other place. This is

³⁸In one episode in *Brick Lane*, during the family’s visit to Buckingham Palace, a stranger wants to take a photo of Nazneen and her family: “Do you mind if I get a shot of all of you together for myself?” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 296-97). At this point, Nazneen’s family becomes a “spectacle” (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 189), as if “they were a curiosity in central London” (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 186).

³⁹In the third chapter of my dissertation, I will discuss in detail the intersectional differences that exist among the South Asian diasporic female characters, for example, differences in class, marital status, religion, among others. See page 71.

mostly because the female characters who arrive from their “traditional communities are not always as mobile as they would like to be” (Kral 67). Immediately after she moves to Boston, Ashima is portrayed as a woman unable to connect with the people around her; she cannot communicate with them because Americans “in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 3). But gradually, the process of integration into the host nation begins. In my reading, Ashima’s very first act of walking through the “balmy streets of Cambridge, to Purity Supreme, to buy a bag of white long-grain rice” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 34) is not only a physical journey but also a metaphorical one towards becoming a global citizen (Saroukhani 12). She represents the metaphorical walker, who transforms each spatial signifier into “an ensemble of possibilities” (Certeau 98). For example, when Ashima steps out, she is “repeatedly stopped on the street, and in the aisles of the supermarket by perfect strangers, all Americans, suddenly taking notice of her, smiling, congratulating her for what she’s done” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 34). In contrast to Nazneen’s invisibility as a walker, Ashima is noticed by strangers. The way Ashima exchanges smiles with strangers during her walk can be read as her encounter with the host culture. Being acknowledged is a crucial turning point for both characters, in fact: after walking unseen for a while, Nazneen is also tapped on the shoulder by a stranger. The only word she is able to tell him is “Sorry” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 61), yet the encounter still pleases her: “She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 61). Therefore, the act of walking transforms Ashima from a “reluctant migrant” (Lahiri Roy 1) into someone who will miss her American life and wants to “remember” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 287) all the moments that she has spent there. Walking also initiates Nazneen into a world that is very different from her life at home in Tower Hamlets. As these women mostly stayed at their “proper” places, that is, inside the apartment, earlier, walking on the streets of cities is an empowering act for them.

5.3. The Interiors of Vehicles

Vehicles, such as cars and buses, play an important role in Lahiri’s short story. For Mrs. Sen, who is oscillating between two contrasting worlds, her home and the host country, the car and the act of driving, have a significant meaning. To explore the significance vehicles such as the car, which “vitality [establishes] radical transnational modes of belonging” (Saroukhani 13), Hengameh Saroukhani coined the term “vehicular

cosmopolitanism” (Saroukhani 11) in her analysis of Bernardine Evaristo’s *Soul Tourists* (2005). According to Saroukhani, vehicular cosmopolitanism reveals how “relations [are] constructed by the seemingly banal intermingling of inanimate forms” (Saroukhani 13). In other words, inanimate forms (such as cars and buses) are “put in the service...in order to excavate unexpected connections between objects and people” (Saroukhani 16). In Lahiri’s narrative, the car, on the one hand, represents an enormous challenge for the female protagonist, as she has always disliked it: “I hate it. I hate driving. I won’t go on.” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 131), while on the other, the interior of the car becomes a transformative space in the short story, a “micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (qtd.in Saroukhani 14). For critics, such as Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha, motility, as a cultural condition, is a state that aims to combat the state of pathology of borders, belligerent nationalisms, and the rationale of racism (Saroukhani 14). It is evident that within the inner space of the car, where Eliot, the American boy she takes care of, is a constant companion to Mrs. Sen, the ceaseless cultural exchange with the American boy has an impact on the female protagonist’s identity. The car signifies a promise in the short story: “‘Mr. Sen says that once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think, Eliot? Will things improve?’ ‘You could go places,’ Eliot suggested. ‘You could go anywhere.’ ‘Could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot?’” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 119). As perceived through the child’s eyes, Mrs. Sen’s fear of driving exposes her lack of desire to integrate into the new culture. She does not consider the land of America as her own country and is not comfortable with its traditions and norms. Though it is not clear whether the protagonist becomes a successful immigrant in the US or not, there is a tinge of hope that she might consider stepping out of her comfort zone in the host nation, which is associated with the act of driving a car in the short story.

Another episode which suggests that Mrs Sen steps out of her comfort zone is her visit to the fish market. The unavailability of her husband and her fear of driving compel Mrs. Sen to take the town bus to go to the seaside to buy fish: “The next time the fish store called she did not call Mr. Sen at his office. She had decided to try something new. There was a town bus that ran on an hourly schedule between the university and the seaside” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 131). However, after encountering minor racial discrimination on the bus, she takes the risk of driving alone, without Mr. Sen’s assistance. She decides to drive from her home to the fish market by car: “One afternoon a few days later the phone rang. Some very tasty halibut had arrived on the boats...They got in the car, and Mrs. Sen drove around the asphalt

loop several times” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 133). However, unfortunately, she is not able to reach the fish market because she has a car accident, suggesting that her efforts are in vain. As fish is associated with her native culture, driving to the market suggests that the space of the car becomes a medium through which she attempts to re-connect with something familiar in the alien host country. The car also connects the domestic space to more open spaces. Hence, the car becomes a medium via which the protagonist tries to integrate the habits of her native culture into her everyday life in America, yet the accident suggests that this is not possible without acquiring, at least to some extent, basic knowledge of the practices of the host country.

Similar to Lahiri’s narrative, vehicles also become sites where female agency is experienced in *Bhaji on the Beach*. The inner space of the minibus, which is hired for the road trip to Blackpool, acts as an ambivalent space within which Chadha provides a subcontinental twist as a group of South Asian females called “Saheli Women’s Group” go on a traditional English holiday to Blackpool (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:08:18). The bus journey is not only a mere road trip for the diasporic women, but it also becomes a search for new possibilities: a journey of self-discovery. In the bus, three generations of female characters are portrayed: an elderly group of women, which includes Asha, Pushpa and Bina, representing an orthodox, conventional mentality; a middle-aged woman, Rekha, who is visiting from Bombay, and is more open-minded and modern compared to the elderly group; and the final category is a group of young women, for instance, Hashida, Ginder, Ladhu and Madhu, who are ready to challenge and subvert both their native traditions and the norms of the host culture as well. Ironically, the same group of women, especially the elderly characters, undergo psychological changes on their return trip from Blackpool. In the beginning, Asha, Pushpa, and Bina criticise Ginder for her failed marriage. However, later on they are considerate towards Ginder, who decides to divorce her husband, and they also support Hashida’s decision of aborting her child. Their experience on the bus, I would argue, undermines traditional versions of Indian femininity. This is because bus driving is regarded as a masculine job in India, but in Chadha’s film the bus driver is female, whose portrayal challenges stereotypical roles. Moreover, the holiday trip for the female characters offers a chance to break free from their everyday concerns as Simi, the organiser of the bus tour, promises an escape from the patriarchal demands they face every day. Thus, based on my analysis it can be concluded that the interiors of vehicles become sites where diasporic female characters experience a sense of agency.

5.4. Transitory Spaces

Besides private and public spaces, and the interiors of vehicles, there are some urban locations, for example, the seaside in *Bhaji on the Beach*, the ice-skating rink in *Brick Lane*, and the football ground in *Bend it like Beckham*, which are somewhat ambiguous in nature. Drawing on the theory of transitional space introduced by D.W. Winnicott, who defines this location as a “*potential space* between the individual and the environment” (Winnicott 135, italics in the original), where cultural experience takes place, I use the term “transitory” to refer to these ambivalent sites. For Winnicott, transitory space is a safe site of experimentation for the self where boundaries are drawn as a result of a playful interaction with the environment. Apart from relying on Winnicott’s theory, I apply the term “transitory” to refer to spaces “where connections may be maintained between an external world and an internal conception of self so that the new significance can be realized” (Aitken and Herman 72). Stuart Aitken and Thomas Herman explain this “new existence” as the “realignment of the ‘self’” (Aitken and Herman 72), which is a crucial aspect of Winnicott’s theory as well. In this subsection, I will analyse the cultural experiences of diasporic women at the ambivalent locations that can be regarded as transitory, such as the seaside, the football ground, and the ice-skating rink.

The seaside in Chadha’s narrative has multiple significances. Each of the women “reaches some sort of crossroads” (Mendes 327) at the seaside. On the one hand, the seashore is associated with the mother’s body, as Winnicott argues, which is an ideal space where one feels safe and secure from cultural threats, but it is also a place where cultural experience is located (Winnicott 129). Though Winnicott considers the experience of culture at this transitory space a very universal phenomenon, the narratives I explore problematize the very notion of what culture is and how it can be experienced. I read the English seaside as a “safe place” for the diasporic characters because it “lies beyond the challenge of society’s rules, [and] it is also a place from which society’s rules may be challenged” (Aitken and Harman 74). In this film, the female protagonists are represented in the “potential space” (Winnicott 129) of the seashore, where they subvert the host culture’s norms and habits as they season French Fries with Indian spices⁴⁰ (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:56:24), for instance. They also challenge the patriarchal norms associated with their home culture: for example, Hashida

⁴⁰Towards the end of this chapter I will explain this in detail in the section titled “Mimicry and Parody”. See page 63.

and Ginder reveal that they plan to undergo abortion and divorce, respectively, despite the criticism from the elderly group of women. Blackpool becomes a site of “fluidity” and “possibility” (Mendes 331), a place where the cultural experiences of the characters “have a position” that “depends [on the] existence on living experiences” (Winnicott 146), and a location where the identities of the diasporic characters are formed. In other words, during the course of their trip to Blackpool, the female characters become more empowered: the seaside represents a “safe place” (Aitken and Harmen 74) where these women can openly discuss their dilemmas and receive support from each other.

During the span of the day, the female characters start to recognise patriarchal oppressions more clearly. For instance, Ginder, who is torn between going back to her husband and raising her son alone, decides to terminate the abusive relationship. Hashida, the pregnant art student, seeks advice regarding abortion. On their way home, the world looks different to them. Ana Mendes points out that the holiday resort of Blackpool with its “pier, tower, illuminations and attractions such as games machines, karaoke, elderly people clapping along to the ‘Birdie Song,’ chips and male strippers...offer a kind of interstitial space and place” (Mendes 331). Relying on Gargi Bhattacharyya and John Gabriel, Mendes further elaborates that Blackpool is “representative of white, working-class British culture, as both Bombay and Bollywood, a conscious artistic choice in the words of the director: ‘The reason for choosing Blackpool was because of the lights. I know that when those lights come on it’s where England meets Bollywood’” (qtd. in Mendes 332). I read the metaphor of light as a subtle reference to the illumination of the minds of the diasporic characters in Blackpool. The transitory space of the seaside makes this space an empowering location for diasporic characters. On their return, all the characters are transformed in their respective ways: the elderly group of women, who have been critical in the beginning become more understanding and supportive, and the younger women are ready to challenge the stereotypical norms of their cultural traditions.

Locations such as the football ground also become a transitory site, which participate in identity formation. For instance, in Chadha’s film, *Bend it like Beckham*, the football ground plays the most significant role in the formation of Jess’ identity: it is associated with her passion, goals, and profession. Being raised in a conservative environment that stresses the importance of traditional values, the “Anglicized Jess” (Giardina 37) dreams of playing football. But her parents have different dreams. They want their daughter to attend university, marry an Indian boy and become a lawyer. Becoming a football player is surely not their

version of her future because they view the game as unwomanly. Moreover, they fear that if their daughter becomes influenced by Western culture, she will disregard her own traditions. Chadha plays with the title of her film: on the one hand, “bending” refers to the professional skill of the star player, David Beckham, but, on the other, it also suggests that in order to achieve her dreams, Jess has to “bend” (Giardina 37) her ways, disregard the conventional rules, and subvert norms. Thus, the football ground has multilayered significance in the protagonist’s life. Although the ground is an open space, it is surrounded by the auditorium. In my reading, this enclosed space of the auditorium may symbolise the constraints that Jess has to face, first, because of her gender, and secondly, because of her religion. But the enclosed auditorium space can also have a positive role: the players receive support from the audience as they clap and cheer. The film making techniques used to in the episodes that depict Jess playing football also suggest that this place has a transformative role in her life. In the beginning of the film, her mother expresses her disgust regarding Jess’ sportswear: “She shouldn’t be running around with all these men showing her bare legs to seventy thousand people. She is bringing shame on the family” (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 0:02:08-0:02:12). Later, however, when she is playing football, the camera angle shifts from Jess’ face to her legs continuously; close-ups of the ways in which she bends the ball are shown, and most importantly, we can see how other players, who are from football teams in the West, observe her skills on the ground. During one of the football matches in England, she is offended by a player of the opponent team who calls her a “Paki,” which is a very insulting word for an Indian. Eventually, Jess proves her skills on the ground in the final match: she scores the penalty shot and wins the match. Thus, the film uses the football ground to portray the transformation of the protagonist: she transforms from the shy girl who sneaked out of her parents’ house without their knowledge into a successful woman who is able to convince them about her career choice. Jess also achieves her dreams of becoming a professional football player in the film. Thus, the football field can be read as a “potential space” (Winnicott 135), a safe site of experimentations where the boundaries of the self are redrawn as a result of a playful interaction with the environment.

Similar to the seaside and the football ground in Chadha’s narratives, the ice-skating rink,⁴¹ as portrayed in Ali’s novel, can also be read as a transitory space. Nazneen’s friend,

⁴¹Though my primary interest lies in discussing the novels, let me highlight the difference between the literary and cinematic versions of Ali’s narrative. The novel captures the ambiguity that lies in the transformation of seemingly confined places into empowering spaces, while the cinematic version, probably for the sake of happy

Razia, and her daughters, Shahana and Bibi, take her to ice-skate. On the surface level, the ice-skating rink may seem like a location where the protagonist enjoys this sport. But I would argue that the area, on a metaphorical level, resembles a “potential space” (Winnicott 135): “In front of [Nazneen] was a huge white circle, bounded by four-feet-high boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice. She looked at the ice and slowly it revealed itself. The criss-cross patterns of a thousand surface scars, the colours that shifted and changed in the lights, the unchanging nature of what lay beneath” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 492). First of all, even though the ice-skating rink is a public place, for the protagonist, it is a confined, enclosed area, similar to her sense of self. In my reading, the act of Nazneen’s ice-skating, which is depicted at the very end of the narrative, is a metaphorical graph of her development in the novel: she endures the “scars” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 492), that is, the oppressions both in Bangladesh and the demeaning comments of her husband, and slowly reveals herself, shifting and changing within the diasporic space. It is also to be foregrounded that although Nazneen has come a long way from being “an unspoilt girl. From the village” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 22) and is now a woman who decides to stay in London with her daughters, she is not entirely free, which is signified by the phrase, “unchanging nature of what lay beneath” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 492). She cannot be entirely free because, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, the neoliberal city allows limited freedom to the individuals. Furthermore, the ice-skating rink is portrayed as a space where she, in her sari, becomes a woman, who is, on the one hand, preserving her native culture, and, on the other, experiences a sense of agency: earlier she watched ice-skaters on television and desired to skate like them, and now she is physically present in the ice-skating rink, fulfilling her dreams. Drawing on the theory of Tawfiq Yousef, who reads this act as an instance of mimicry (Yousef 74-75), I claim that Nazneen realigns (Aitken and Herman 72) and redefines her identity in the West, subverting Western traditions by the act of ice-skating in a sari. Similar to the football ground in Chada’s film, then, the ice-skating rink can be read as a transitory space where the boundaries of the self are reconstituted due to a playful engagement with the environment. As I have argued, this is one of the most significant aspects of empowerment the narratives I analyse depict.

ending, fails to capture this ambivalence. Ali’s novel concludes with the female protagonist skating in her sari, but the cinematic version portrays Nazneen, lying in the snow with her daughters, Sahana and Bibi. This conclusion suggests that the protagonist has evolved as an independent individual in the West almost in a utopian way. A similar ambiguity is observed in *The Mistress of Spices*. While the cinematic version portrays the female protagonist as a beautiful young woman, in the novel she is old, her skin is wrinkled. Thus, she applies a special spice, Makaradwaj, to transform into a charming woman before going out with her lover, Raven.

6. Empowering Strategies: Mimicry and Parody as Acts of Subversion

The characters in the narratives I explore often imitate Western traditions, which is akin to Bhabha's concept of mimicry. When the first-generation diasporic characters try to enact the customs of the West, there always remains a gap or a difference between their imitation and the Western practices they are mimicing. Therefore, as showcased in the narratives, for the first-generation women, mimicry "represents an *ironic* compromise" (Bhabha 122, italics in the original). The more the characters imitate the host culture, the contrast between the diasporic subjects and the natives of the West becomes obvious. Despite the compromise that the female characters undergo due to emulation of Western norms, mimicry acts as the "sign of a double articulation" (Bhabha 122), which can be regarded as an empowering strategy. On the one hand, it is a strategy which "'appropriates' the Other (here it refers to South Asian female characters)" (Bhabha 122), but on the other hand, it "poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha 123) in the host culture.

Some of the acts of mimicry characters perform take place at transitory spaces, which suggests that a non-normative, hybrid sense of culture can be experienced at these potential spaces in the diasporic narratives. For instance, in Gurinder Chadha's film, *Bhaji on the Beach*, the characters, Pushpa and Bina, are portrayed seasoning French Fries with Indian spices (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:56:24) at the seaside. In my reading, the image of the Indian women eating English food with native spices at the Blackpool, which is a typical English holiday resort, is an act of mimicry. This act of the diasporic women can also be seen as a "threat" (Bhabha 123), which produces "slippage" (Bhabha 123) in the Western cultural context. Bina's gesture of taking out Indian spices from her bag in order to season the French Fries signifies that the norms of the host culture can be challenged by even apparently insignificant, everyday acts.

Similar to Chadha's cinematic narrative, instances of mimicry can also be found in *Brick Lane*. The protagonist's act of ice-skating in a sari in London, which, similar to the seaside, I have read as a transitory space, has been interpreted as an instance of "Bhabhaian mimicry" (Yousef 74-75) by some critics, such as Tawfiq Yousef. Nazneen's desire to skate on the ice while retaining her native culture makes her conscious decision evident: "'But you can't skate in a sari,'" she protests, but her friend, Razia, affirms that "'[t]his is England,' . . . 'You can do whatever you like'" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 492). Nazneen's ice-skating in her sari

narrativises a two-fold articulation: on the one hand, she imitates Western culture by the act of skating, which refers to the “mimicry of the ‘original’ the ‘true’ which exists at the source of power” (Ashcroft et al. 88). But on the other hand, her act is similar to metaphorically “writing back” in the “language of the dominant culture” (Ashcroft et al. 5), as she is ready to “conquer” the ice-skating rink: “Nazneen turned round. To get on the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 492). Furthermore, Nazneen, who watched ice-skating on TV and was mesmerised by it after she moved to London, had difficulty in pronouncing the word “ice-skating”: as there are no double consonants in Bengali, she said “ice e skating” instead: “‘Ice e-skating,’ said Nazneen. ‘Ice skating,’ said Chanu. ‘Ice e-skating’” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 36). For Ali’s protagonist, therefore, the act of ice-skating is a form of conquest: she is ready to practice the sport that seemed unattainable for her at the beginning. As Ágnes Györke claims, the practice of ice-skating reveals an “inner triumph” (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 187), though there is a tension between this triumph and the way in which Nazneen is perceived by others in the city (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 187). This tension is due to the fact that although she imitates the traditions of the host nation, her skin colour and attire distinguish her as the “Other” (Bhabha 122). Thus, Nazneen’s ice-skating is not merely a sport that she indulges in, rather, it becomes a medium through which she, a diasporic subject from the Third World, achieves a sense of empowerment in London.

Instances of mimicry are also evident in *Bend it like Beckham*. Jess, the protagonist, is shown putting on her sari with the help of her Western teammates before she returns to her sister’s wedding (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 1:30:05). In another episode, she runs across the football ground in her sari to meet her coach, Joe (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 1:39:45). I read these scenes as acts of subversion. They show how Jess, a second-generation character, fights back for her father’s humiliation, as Mr. Bhamra has been a victim of racial discrimination for wearing traditional clothes by English cricket players.⁴² Wearing sari at these emphatically Western locations may be seen as a “threat” (Bhabha 123) in the host nation. Jess no longer conforms to stereotypes projected on migrants: imitating the practices

⁴²In *Bend it like Beckham*, Jess’s father, Mr. Bhamra recalls his past when he was mistreated by English cricket players and thrown out of the cricket team despite his remarkable skills. He was mocked because of his turban and beard (which is associated with the religious customs of Sikhs). Though he never complained against those English players, he vowed not to play cricket ever again. The character of Mr. Bhamra is inspired by Chadha’s father, who was also a victim of racial discrimination because of his turban and beard, and he had to shave off his beard in order to get a job in England.

of Western people yet always remaining “other” due to her skin colour and attire, she embodies the difference that is “*almost the same but not quite*” (Bhabha 122, italics in the original). Therefore, the mimicry the female characters practice in the narratives I analyse help them subvert the conventions of the host nation.

In addition to mimicking Western culture, South Asian diasporic women, as the narratives represent, also mock their native cultural norms. In my reading, mocking of cultural traditions adds a parodical effect to their actions. To analyse the instances of parody, which I define as an “imitation” that is “typically negative in intent” but may also “be a comic exercise” (“Parody”), I will provide a close reading of the cinematic narratives of Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham* and *Bhaji on the Beach*, situating them in the context of Bollywood cinema. Parody and melodrama are common motifs that are employed in Bollywood movies. Highlighting the significance of melodrama, Ravi Vasudevan points out that “melodrama [is] a public-fictional form deriving from a recalibration of the relationship between public and private spheres” (Vasudevan 10). Features of melodrama include “an emphasis on loss of family, of community, and the difficulties of achieving romantic fulfilment, and exhibited high contrivance in narrative mechanisms, for example of coincidence, as if insistently locking dramatis personae to a particular narrative universe” (Vasudevan 10). In Chadha’s films, the mocking scenes are introduced to provide a comical effect. These parodical acts echo the notion of comedy that Sara Ilott discusses in her work, “The Comedy of Multicultural Britain.” Ilott argues that comedy has a political and psychological role as well, as it gives “voice to taboo subjects and [reveals] socially repressed desires or fears” (Ilott 134). As for the political role of comedy, in Chadha’s films religious and social issues, two most significant themes in South Asian households, are parodied. In *Bend it like Beckham*, the protagonist’s mother, Mrs. Bhamra, is depicted offering long prayers to the Sikh god so that her daughter might receive good grades in her A-Level exam (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 1:14:42). In another episode, female family members appear to Jess in front of a goal post (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 1:28:55), who seem to rebuke her for her career choices. In my reading, this episode suggests that the protagonist is not encouraged to fulfil her dream. In the game of football, the goal post is the point where one can score a goal. Here, however, Jess’ family members appear in front of the goal post, as if they were creating an obstacle for her, thus hindering her from fulfilling her goal, which is playing football professionally. These examples, suggest that the film parodies Indian people’s belief in superstition on the one hand, and, on the other, it also depicts how children

in Indian families do not have the freedom to choose their careers: it is the father or the guardian-figure who decides for them.

Similar to *Bend it like Beckham*, *Bhaji on the Beach* also parodies religion: the film opens with a larger-than-normal image of the Hindu deity, Vishnu (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:02:10). The size of the image and the sound effects add a melodramatic aspect to the scene. This episode takes place in a grocery store that Asha runs in London. Kirandeep Kaur Peart points out that “[t]he scene reveals both British and Indian influences: the Bollywood posters reflect South Asian culture as representative of the East as Cadbury’s chocolate and Coca-Cola are of western culture. The double consciousness that is arguably attached to all diaspora subjects becomes visible here. Asha’s private and public selves are joined” (Peart 60). In other words, Peart contends that the scene highlights the interconnectedness of Eastern and Western traditions as well as the private and public aspects of Asha’s self. However, I would argue that this scene does not create a seamless balance between these traditions: I read it as an instance of parody because it seems to mock the god-fearing attitude of Indian people. The scene also reveals how the female character, who abides by the patriarchal norms of her homeland in the beginning of the film, gradually evolves into a more empowered individual. She also transforms from a god-fearing person to a more open-minded individual, as I have argued.

Furthermore, repressed desires and taboos are also portrayed in a comic manner in the film. For example, in one episode Asha hallucinates that Ginder is rude to her in-laws, which is followed by the melodramatic heart attack of her mother-in-law (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:20:30). In another episode, she imagines Hashida in a Western attire, smoking cigarettes in front of her family members in an Indian temple (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:30:50). The hallucinations about Ginder and Hashida are “metaphor[s] for Asha’s warped perspective” (Ilott 147). This is because neither of them conforms to stereotypical notions (Ilott 147) and expectations put on South Asian women: Ginder decides to terminate her abusive marriage, and Hashida plans to abort her pre-marital pregnancy.

The main role of parody in Chada’s films, then, is to expose and subvert the patriarchal traditions female diasporic migrants are struggling with. However, I would claim that some of the parodical acts are directed against both their native traditions and the norms of the host culture. For example, the issues of racism, represented in *Bhaji on the Beach*, can be read as an instance of parody in which South Asian women challenge patriarchal norms as well as

mock the racism of the host culture. With the help of Hashida, a second-generation migrant, and Ambrose⁴³, the English man whom Asha meets at Blackpool, Chadha explores the issue of race. During their trip to Blackpool, the older women, sitting in a café, are seen gossiping about Hashida's pregnancy and her black boyfriend. The scene juxtaposes "white racism" with "self-abasing migrant comedy" (Ilott 147), as Sarah Ilott argues. This episode can be read on multiple levels: on the one hand, the white woman at the counter criticises Pushpa and Bina as they eat Indian food inside the café, warning them that "it's strictly English food in here" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:58:32). The café is a typical example of a public place that imposes norms and rules on the female characters: inside the café the Indian women are not allowed to eat Indian food, as opposed to their experience at the seaside discussed earlier, where they were free to flavour French fries with Indian spices. In fact, the peaceful scene at the seaside is the exact opposite of the episode that takes place at the café: Hashida throws hot drink on one of the older Indian women (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:59:09), who criticises her black boyfriend and her pregnancy out-of-wedlock. By pouring hot drink on the Indian woman, Hashida not only adds a melodramatic effect to the scene, but she also challenges the patriarchal norms of India, which regard a woman who conceives out-of-wedlock inferior, especially with a partner from a different race. Later, Hashida also messes up with the white woman at the counter (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:59:12) telling her to "fuck off too" (Ilott 148), which can be considered as her way of raising her voice against racism.

The scene that depicts Ambrose, the Englishman, in an Indian attire is yet another example of parody that exposes racism in Britain. Ambrose, an Englishman, is dancing in the rain, and his face paint is coming off (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:09:09), revealing his white skin underneath. Emphasising the stereotypical Bollywood setting that relies on romantic music, rain and lighting, Ana Mendes has noted that the scene has a parodistic effect:

Asha runs through the park dressed in an ornamented sari, while Ambrose is in a wig, traditional kurta pajamas and make-up to look Indian. He chases her through the garden and when he catches up with her by a tree it starts to rain and the

⁴³Ambrose Waddington is a "self-entitled 'actor, historian, and ancient Blackpudlian,' who takes [Asha] on a sight-seeing excursion of the seaside resort, culminating in a visit to an empty theatre" (Mendes 334-35).

make-up streams down his face, revealing the whiteness beneath the streaks of brown face-paint. (Mendes 335)

This scene, apart from portraying a serious issue such as racism, also comments on the traditional role that South Asian female characters play: as Peart argues, “[o]nce the fantasy ends, Asha firmly places herself back in the role of the South Asian female, ashamed of her behaviour and reminded of her *izzat*⁴⁴...the film reveals the control [of patriarchy] projected [on women] through the culture of *izzat*” (Peart 60-61, italics in the original).

One of the purposes that these comic scenes serve in the films is to reflect on the struggle of the diasporic subjects for “agency, an imbalance of power, and a need, a desire, for release” (Ilott 137); parody offers a release, which has a “cathartic” effect that is “achieved through laughter” (Ilott 138). Based on my analysis of the novels and the films, I have shown that diasporic characters use both mimicry and parody as acts of subversion in the West. Transitory spaces such as the seaside, the ice-skating rink and the football ground are the primary locations where these subversive acts are performed. Furthermore, the characters in Chada’s films use parody to mock and ridicule the patriarchal norms associated with their home countries. But sometimes besides mocking their native traditions, these women are also parodying the “norms” of their host cultures: racist attitudes, for instance. It is my contention, nevertheless, that diasporic characters are able to perform these acts of subversion because they are in a privileged position as compared to their situation in their home countries.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the ways in which geographical locations in the West, that is, cities in the UK and the US, have an impact on the identity of the South Asian diasporic characters. Relying on the theories of Anderson and Massey, I have shown how urban places are saturated with cultural connotations. Terms such as “places,” “spaces,” and “traces” have been explained from the perspective of cultural geography. While places are the sites where diasporic subjects have been introduced to the traditions of the host land, these characters transform places into spaces by appropriating Western cultural norms. It is the individual spaces where the contestation of both home and host cultural norms is performed by the characters. Furthermore, de Certeau’s theory has helped me explain that Western cities

⁴⁴“Izzat” is an Arabic word, which means “personal dignity or respect” (“Izzat”).

become the locations where diasporic women gain agency. By dividing the places into different categories, for example, private, public, vehicular and transitory, I have explored how the identities of female protagonists are transformed at these locations. Theories of Saroukhani and Winnicott have been used to portray the features of vehicular cosmopolitanism and transitory space. For example, I have relied on Saroukhani's notion of vehicular cosmopolitanism to show how the interior of vehicles can become empowering sites for characters, such as Mrs. Sen in Lahiri's short story and the female protagonists in *Bhaji on the Beach*. Also, Winnicott's theory has provided a psychoanalytical approach to the representation of transitory spaces, such as the seaside and the ice-skating rink.

Based on my analysis it is evident how identities are rethought in the narratives: for instance, the private locations, such as the kitchen and the apartment, which are apparently claustrophobic in nature, act as a place of refuge for the characters, as is seen in the case of Mrs. Sen, who displays her culinary skills in the kitchen and in the living room. I have also explored how public locations such as the spice store in Divakaruni's novel is transformed from a prison-like place into an empowering space where the protagonist dares to violate the strict patriarchal rules associated with her home culture. Similarly, other public places such as the streets of London in *Brick Lane* and that of Boston in *The Namesake* are contested by Nazneen and Ashima. I have relied on the notion of flânerie to analyse how Western city streets become empowering spaces for the South Asian characters, who are otherwise constrained in the private realm. Similar to private and public places, the interiors of the vehicles are also transformative locations for diasporic characters, as is seen in the case of Mrs. Sen. When Mrs Sen decides to drive to the fish market without Mr. Sen by her side, the act gives hope to the readers that she might develop a viable attitude towards the host culture. But unfortunately, she is unable to reach the fish market as she has a car accident, which suggests that though Mrs Sen is trying to integrate the habits of her native culture into her everyday life in America, she is unable to balance these traditions without acquiring basic knowledge of the practices of the host country.

Finally, my chapter has showcased that female characters perform strategies such as mimicry and parody, which I have read as acts of subversion. With the help of close reading, I have shown how the diasporic characters imitate Western norms, which occur mostly at transitory sites: for example, Chadha's characters season their French Fries with Indian spices at the seaside in Blackpool, Nazneen practices ice-skating in her traditional attire in London, and Jess runs across the football ground in an Indian attire in London. Although I have relied

on Bhabha's theory of mimicry to analyse the imitation of Western norms by the immigrants, I have probed further into the analysis of subversive acts and included parody, which, as I have argued, primarily reveals the protagonists' act of challenging the patriarchal norms of their home countries. Instances of parody abound in Chadha's films: for instance, Jess' mother prays to the Sikh god in her apartment for her daughter's good grades. In another episode in *Bend it like Beckham*, Jess' family members appear in front of the goal post before her penalty shot. Another instance of parody that I have analysed include the appearance of an enormous Hindu deity in Asha's grocery store. Based on my analysis, it can be concluded that religion and native cultural practices are some of the issues that Chadha's films parody. Furthermore, I have explored how some instances of parody challenge both native patriarchal norms and the practices of the host culture. As pointed out in this chapter, parodies of racism in *Bhaji on the Beach* mock the "norms" of the host culture. For example, the episode that takes place in Blackpool café, shows how Hashida challenges Indian beliefs regarding intercultural relationships, yet it also reveals how she protests against racism by criticising the white woman at the café counter. In a similar way, Asha's fantasy of dancing in the rain with an Englishman in a park parodies both patriarchal native traditions and racism in Britain: Asha, as an obedient Indian wife, feels ashamed of flirting with Ambrose, which highlights how the patriarchal norms of her homeland are ingrained in her. At the same time, as Ambrose's face-paint is coming off his white skin is revealed, which can be read as a parody of white racism. All in all, reading diasporic the narratives from a gender-conscious angle suggests that apart from Bhabhaian mimicry, parody directed against patriarchal native traditions and white racism can also be a significant empowering strategy for diasporic women.

CHAPTER 3

Intersectionality and Its Impact on Identity Formation: A Comparative Analysis of South Asian Diasporic Female Characters

1. Introduction

As I have indicated in the introduction, my primary aim is to investigate how the identities of South Asian diasporic women are affected in the Western urban metropolis. In the previous chapter, I have explored the impact of Western cities, such as London, San Francisco, and New York City, among others, on the transformation of female identity at various geographical scales. Although all the diasporic female protagonists are from the Third World in the narratives which I have selected, they can be grouped based on internal differences. In this chapter, I rely on Kimberle Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality⁴⁵ to discuss these differences, which she defines as a concept "to denote the various ways in which [race, gender, class and sexuality] interact to shape the multiple dimensions" of women's experiences (Crenshaw 1244). My aim is to explore the significant intersectional differences that characterise female protagonists, such as differences based on religion, nationality, region, culture, language, among others. The South Asian diasporic community is not a homogeneous group. Thus, "ignoring difference *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups" (Crenshaw 1242, italics in the original), as Crenshaw argues. The different categories that these characters can be put into have "meaning and consequences" (Crenshaw 1297). These categories have "particular values attached to them" and they "create social hierarchies" (Crenshaw 1297). The notion of intersectionality "attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1297). Drawing on Crenshaw's theory, this chapter focuses on how the identities of South Asian diasporic female characters are affected by displacement based on their intersectional differences portrayed in the texts I analyse.

As my reading showcases, women of colour are more exposed to violence as a result of intersectional differences. Exploring the racial and gendered dimensions of violence against women of colour, Crenshaw argues that women of colour are doubly marginalised: "because

⁴⁵Intersectionality is the "assertion that social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization...[it] encourages recognition of the differences that exist *among* groups, moving dialogue beyond considering only the differences *between* groups" (Smooth 11, italics in the original).

of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (Crenshaw 1244, italics in the original). Apart from race and gender, other aspects of identity, such as religion, financial and social status also contribute to marginalisation, among others. The literary and cinematic texts that I analyse showcase how the protagonists are disempowered when they arrive at Western cities. Most of the female characters are victims of patriarchal and racial oppression. The immigrant women who accompany their husbands suffer because of their dependence on their husbands regarding their legal status (Crenshaw 1248). This dependency on the male members is evident in *The Namesake* and in “Mrs. Sen’s.” Highlighting the victimisation of Asian women, Brah argues that beside being “passive victims” of racialised imagination, Asian women have also been at the forefront because of their “workplace struggles, immigration campaigns, campaigns against racist attacks, activities around reproductive rights and sexual violence, education, welfare, and contestations around feminist theory and practice” (Brah 12). While in *Brick Lane* Nazneen is constantly belittled at home, Ginder in *Bhaji on the Beach* is in an abusive marital relationship, and Jess in *Bend it like Beckham* and Hashida in *Bhaji on the Beach* are victims of racial attacks. Before discussing intersectional differences in detail, I will explore the main aspects that characterize the formation of South Asian diasporic identities in the West.

2. Identity and the South Asian Diaspora

In order to understand the interconnectedness of identity and culture, and the identities that the diasporic subjects acquire, I rely on Stuart Hall, who claims that identities are “constantly [produced] and [reproduced] . . . anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 235). Many of the female characters in the narratives I explore have to “leave home precisely in order to forge their own version of their identities” (Massey 11, emphasis in the original). As I argue in this chapter, intersectional differences constitute the sense of “who a person is” (Versluys 89), as Eline Versluys puts it. The question I want to focus on is how these aspects of identity shift and transform as diasporic women are displaced from their homeland to the host nation. When immigrant women move from one place to another, they gradually imbibe the cultures of the host nation: aspects of the identities that they used to have in their homeland are transformed and they carve a new identity for themselves in the West.

Underlining the changing nature of identity, Brah asserts that “we are all constantly changing but this *changing illusion* is precisely what we *see* as real and concrete about

ourselves and others” (Brah 20, italics in the original). In exploring the various meanings of identity, Brah relies on the definitions of Erik Erikson (1968), and of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1971). Erikson defines identity as follows: “*a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity*” (qtd. in Brah 20), “a unity of *personal and cultural* identity rooted in an ancient people’s fate” (qtd. in Brah 20), “a process ‘located *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his [sic] communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities” (qtd. in Brah 20, italics in the original). Erikson’s definition of identity is further echoed by Berger and Luckman, who argue that identity is a “reality” that is socially constructed and “during the course of everyday life, a person is conscious of the world [having] ‘multiple⁴⁶ realities,’ but among them ‘there is one that presents itself as the reality par excellence’” (qtd. in Brah 20). The narratives of the South Asian writers portray the impact of similar multiple realities on the identities of female characters. For example, Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* changes her names from Noyantara to Tilottama and finally, to Maya. Similarly, Jasmine in Mukherjee’s narrative keeps changing her identity, which is reflected in the names she is using: first Jyoti, then Jasmine, which is followed by Jase and Jane. But there is a difference between the identities of Tilo and Jasmine. While Tilo’s multiple identities trace her *bildung* within the narrative, Jasmine’s various names are given by the people she meets during her diasporic journey, and these do not necessarily reflect an inner development.

The obvious difference between first- and second-generation immigrants regarding their identity formation is clearly evident in *The Namesake*. Unlike Ashima, a first-generation migrant, who obtains a dual identity, Moushumi, who belongs to the second generation, is a rebellious character who refuses to comply with the traditions of her parents. In compliance with the meaning of her name, a “southwesterly breeze,” “force of nature,” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 240), Moushumi does not regret divorcing Gogol for her lover, Dimitri. Highlighting the defiant nature of the subsequent generation, Lahiri’s novel informs that “[t]hey are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 276). Although it was Ashima who had encouraged Gogol to meet Moushumi, “they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis of Ashoke and Ashima’s generation do...That pressure has given away, in the sense of the

⁴⁶In my dissertation, I read the idea of multiple realities in the context of diaspora, and it refers to both home culture and host culture.

subsequent generation, to American common sense” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 276). Furthermore, during her marriage, Moushumi, in contrast to a Bengali ritual which holds that a wife is supposed to take up her husband’s surname, has kept “her last name. She doesn’t adopt Ganguli, not even with a hyphen” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 227).

In *The Namesake*, Sonia functions as a signifier for the smooth “transitioning” and “renegotiating” of transnational identities without experiencing “excess angst” (Lahiri Roy 8). She gradually remoulds herself from an American teenager to a confident attorney in Boston. She consciously chooses a partner for herself: Ben is “raised in Newton, close to where Gogol and Sonia grew up. He is an editor at the *Globe*” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 270, italics in the original). Her relationship with Ben may seem subversive as it unifies “two ethnic minorities”⁴⁷ (Lahiri Roy 9) “living on the fringes of the white America’s hegemonic discourse” (Lahiri Roy 9). Therefore, in the case of Lahiri’s female characters, identities are transformed according to three different patterns, depending on how they challenge, reconstruct, and transcend national and cultural borders: they either construe a balanced, dual identity, such as Ashima, refuse to have hyphenated identity, as Moushumi, or identify entirely with the host culture, as Sonia does.

Foregrounding the formation of transnational identity, Bharati Mukherjee’s novel also orchestrates a quest for reconstruction. *Jasmine* depicts the “trials of assimilation” and the “resultant cross-cultural ambiguity” (Ganaie 180): the main character creates a transnational identity in Western cities, which enables her to become detached from her connection to her cultural roots. As discussed before, Jasmine, similar to Divakaruni’s protagonist, takes up different names: Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase and Jane. However, these names are given by the different people she meets in Iowa, Florida, and New York City. At first sight, multiple names given to Jasmine may seem to map “identities imposed upon her by men and by older, powerful women” (Ganaie 176), trying to keep her fixed in place. However, she comes to realise that the notion of a “singular identity” in an “alien place” is a “fallacy” (Ganaie 176-77) and, rejecting the singular identities imposed on her by others, takes up multiple identities. She imagines a husband for each of the identity that she has been transformed into: “I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane, Half-Face for Kali” (Mukherjee 197). The lack of a singular identity

⁴⁷Ben is himself a product of two ethnicities which have deeply felt the pangs of exclusion in the US prior to diasporic assimilation with the passage of time. These people are excluded by white America as “racial/cultural outsider” (Lahiri Roy 9).

evokes Hall's argument that "identities are never completed, never finished, that they are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process (Hall, S., *Essential Essays* 69). As Jasmine moves across the geographical scales of her local communities, she continuously needs to discard her old identity and acquire new ones. This constant transformation also evokes the pattern of the frontier novel. As Altaf Ganaie points out, Mukherjee's novel is "inscribed in the old American pattern, the pattern of the frontier novel – the escape from the old identity, the old debts, the old wife to the new name, to the new life, and from the farm land of Punjab to the frontier of California" (Ganaie 176). Thus, by the constant naming and renaming of the protagonist Mukherjee's novel not only explores how Jasmine feels in the West, but it also exposes how others see her, and hints at the tension that results from this clash.

Even though the aim of this dissertation is to explore the formation of diasporic female identities, I consider it important to briefly discuss the identity formation of male characters as well in order to show that male characters also undergo significant transformations in relation to how they perceive themselves and relate to women in the West. I will analyse the formation of male identities primarily through the naming tradition in Bengali culture as represented in Lahiri's novel. In a typical Bengali household, it is a ritual to give two names to a child: a good name called "bhalo"⁴⁸ name, which is "daak naam" in Bengali. While good names signify formal usage, pet names are a "persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 26). Similar to Gogol, Ashima and Ashoke, Gogol's parents, also have pet names: Monu and Mithu, respectively. Pet names are part of a child's identity, which cannot be discarded easily. Sometimes these names are a "persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 26). On the contrary, good names represent "dignified and enlightened qualities" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 26). Good names are especially to be used in public settings and therefore, they appear on "envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 26). Pet names are never recorded for official purposes, and they are to be mentioned only by parents, family members, and close relatives. Pet names have "no aspirations" and they are mostly "meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, even onomatopoeic" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 26). Unfortunately, often these pet names are misused and mocked in public, and this bullying has an impact on the children for the rest of their lives. In *The Namesake*, the protagonist is not

⁴⁸A pet name is different from a nickname or a shortened version of a good name. It is a complete different name in a Bengali culture.

only burdened by the conflict between good name and pet name, but another cultural reference is added to Gogol's name by the reference to the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. This name evokes Gogol's sense of alienation: as "no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 78). Apart from evoking alienation, the reference to Nikolai Gogol can be associated with cross-fertilization and hybridity. In the following paragraphs, I will explore the relevance of this reference in Lahiri's novel in detail.

Highlighting the close association between Russia and Bengal from the eighteenth century on levels of trade, commerce, ideology, literature, and culture, Sanjukta Dasgupta points out that Lahiri's novel suggests that "cultural globalization began in Bengal with the advent of the European traders" (Dasgupta 531). According to Dasgupta, Russian culture had a positive impact on India in the 19th and in the early 20th centuries,⁴⁹ which suggests that the reference to Nikolai Gogol has a positive connotation. I also argue that the connection can be seen as a positive one as Gogol's father associates the name "Gogol" with his miraculous survival of a train accident. During one of his train journeys in Calcutta, Ashoke, Gogol's father, had an accident in which he was nearly killed. Just before the accident he was reading a story by Nikolai Gogol. While being rescued, he was "still clutching a page of 'The Overcoat'" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 18). Ashoke was lucky to be saved, and "[i]nstead of thanking God he thanks Gogol, the Russian writer who had saved his life" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 21). Thus, for Ashoke, his son, Gogol, reminds him "of everything that followed" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 124) the train accident. Gogol, however, cannot relate to the Russian name. Rather, he desires to be associated with American culture and takes refuge in his American girlfriend's house, so as to be a part of an authentic American tradition: "From the very beginning he feels effortlessly incorporated into [his girlfriend's and her family's] lives. It's a different brand of hospitality from what he is used to" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 136). Gogol is unable to fully identify with American culture either. His lack of identification with his Russian name and with American culture is evident in a significant episode that depicts his school's field trip to a graveyard. In my reading, the space of the graveyard foregrounds his longing for a place in America where he can physically anchor his family's legacy. While Gogol fails to find a name on the tombstones similar to his, he also realises that "he will be

⁴⁹Dasgupta lists a few examples to prove this point: Gandhi named his headquarters "Tolstoy Farm" in South Africa and published Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindoo* in 1908, and he also paid homage to Gorky whom he called a champion of people's rights (Dasgupta 532).

burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in [the] country will bear his name beyond his life” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 69). Thus, Gogol seems to have no place in this narrative as he can rely on no recognisable cultural tradition. Therefore, though his name evokes hybridity and cross-fertilization, it is also associated with a profound sense of alienation.

Gogol’s lack of a viable identity is further evident when, towards the end of the narrative, he decides to officially change his name to Nikhil, which is a name that he has rejected earlier. Nikhil, which in Bengali means “he who is entire, encompassing all” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 56) suggests that he is still attached to his parental roots, that is, to Bengali culture. Similar to Ashima, Gogol too chooses a hybrid identity, an ambivalent in-betweenness (Bhabha 20) to maintain a balance between the cultures of India and America. In accordance with the meaning of his good name, that is, Nikhil, Gogol relates to his Indian identity while staying within the diasporic space in the US.

In contrast to Gogol, who tries to maintain a connection with his parents’ native culture, his father, Ashoke, is a member of the transnational community and “seeks to acquire citizenship of [the] host country” (Bruneau 43-44). Although it is true that Ashoke maintains ties with his family members in India by visiting them, and through letters and phone-calls, his decision to stay in America on a long-term basis, against the wish of his wife, echoes Miyoshi’s concept of transnational immigrants. Highlighting the detachment of transnational people and their independence from the nation they left behind, Miyoshi claims that transnational migrants are no more limited to any home nation, rather, they are ready to explore and settle down anywhere in the world in order to fulfil their interests (Miyoshi 736). This is true in the case of Ashoke, who leaves Calcutta and moves to the US in search of better educational opportunities and to fulfil his own self-interest: he applies for admission to American universities without the knowledge of his parents, and later on, after the birth of his first child, he even refuses to return to Calcutta, as he knows that staying in America will be beneficial for him and for his descendants. Thus, similar to diasporic female characters, male characters, too, undergo transformations regarding how they see themselves and relate to others in the West. This also explains why some male characters are able to assist female characters in their *bildung*, which I will discuss in detail in the subsection on “Solidarity”. In order to examine the specific ways in which female diasporic identities transform, however, let us first examine the intersectional differences that characterize female protagonists and explore how these differences participate in identity formation.

3. Intersectional Differences and Identity Formation

Although all the diasporic women are from the Third World in the narratives I analyse, they have different experiences in the West as a result of their intersectional differences. In the following subsections I will explore how diasporic identities are formed and reformed based on religion, class, marital status, English-speaking skills, and finally, the generational gap between the first and the second-generation immigrants. I have considered the above-mentioned aspects the most significant intersectional differences as these have an impact not only on diasporic identities but also on female empowerment in the narratives I explore.

3.1. Religion: A Marker of Difference Between the Female Protagonists

Religion is one of the primary markers of difference in the South Asian diasporic community. The protagonists of the narratives I analyse are Hindu, Muslim or Sikh by religion. The narratives showcase how the different religious orientations, with their respective dogmas and beliefs, become part of the protagonists' identities. For example, Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Jasmine and Tilo are Hindu, Nazneen is a Muslim, and Jess is a Sikh. In contrast to the Hindu female characters, Jess and Nazneen experience religious oppression besides patriarchal violence. Jess' mother chastises her for her attire, which is inappropriate according to her religious norms. Similarly, Ali's narrative shows that Islam imposes the practice of hijab⁵⁰ on women. In my reading, hijab is not simply a part of a Muslim woman's attire, but it also symbolises the age-old oppression on women by the male-dominated society. Though Ali's novel has been allegedly critiqued for its inauthenticity,⁵¹ *Brick Lane* raises issues related to gender, racism, and oppression through the representation of Muslim women in the West.

Islam imposes patriarchal measures on women, which is represented clearly in *Brick*

⁵⁰Hijab is a veil worn especially by Muslim women in the presence of male members outside their immediate family. This veil is used to cover the face and other parts of the body of women.

⁵¹Ali's *Brick Lane* has been criticised for its alleged inauthenticity. Irmtraud Huber states that "the criticism for textual authenticity seems to come from people who have not read the book, but they have been confronted with the attribution of authenticity by the media" (Huber 167). The Greater Sylhet Welfare and Development Council wrote an eighteen-page letter of complaint to *The Guardian* and asked Monica Ali to correct the false depictions of Bangladeshis as pronounced by one of the major characters, Chanu (Huber 168). In time for the release of the movie, Ali herself wrote about the *Brick Lane* affair: "The second bit of baggage to unpack comes with the label 'authenticity' attached? What right does a novelist have to explore any particular subject matter? Who hands out the licences? It appears that some people object to my having written about a Bangladeshi housewife who speaks hardly any English, when I myself am reasonably fluent in the language" (Ali, "The Outrage Economy"). Ali has been further condemned for the fact that even though she is not from the Sylheti region and has never visited the place, she has written from that perspective, so "unless she has done good research, her accounts and depictions are likely to be flawed" (Huber 170).

Lane. The worn-out prejudice regarding the helpless situation of women is evident in the novel when Nazneen's maternal aunt asserts that "[w]e are just women. What can we do?"... 'God has made the world this way'" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 103). This quotation suggests that men are born to dominate and treat women as mere objects. The objectification of women is also apparent in Chanu's description of Nazneen: "Not beautiful, but not so ugly either. The face is broad, big forehead. Eyes are a bit too close together...Not tall. Not short. Around five foot two. Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 22-23). Nazneen is described in terms of her bodily features, as if measured like an animal to be bought. Apart from being objectified, women, in the name of religion, are also constrained by the patriarchal society from living a life of their own, fulfilling their desires, going out to work, and choosing their partners to marry.

Religion is a significant theme in Ali's narrative: the protagonist is always seen wearing a hijab whenever she goes out, presenting herself as a faithful woman who follows her religious norms. But the author "problematizes the practice of hijab both implicitly and explicitly" (Pereira-Ares 201). On the one hand, the hijab becomes an "emblem of tradition, a symbol of obedience to Qur'anic principles, and an instrument to control men's sexual temptation" (Pereira-Ares 202), but, on the other, the veil is an "element of cultural identification which even transcends the mere religious sphere" (Pereira-Ares 202). For Nazneen, the hijab is not "just a clothing. But as a matter of fact...it is a serious thing" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 377). Furthermore, Noemí Pereira-Ares quotes Iranian writer Zahra Rahnavard to point out that Muslim women use the hijab to prevent themselves from becoming "an object whose value lies solely in [their] looks" (Pereira-Ares 202). In a similar vein, relying on Franz Fanon and Jasmin Zine, she argues that "the Western urge to unveil Muslim women underscores the desire of the controlling Western male gaze to appropriate the body of the Muslim woman who can see without being seen" (Pereira-Ares 203). As Nazneen is walking on the streets one day wearing the hijab, she thinks about her invisibility: "But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed)...She enjoyed this thought" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 56). I argue that Nazneen's physical presence on the street is an empowering act. She, similar to God, acquires a superior position from where she can establish her presence in the metropolitan city space, without being a victim of the male gaze, which, as I have argued earlier, is the position of the *flâneuse*. Thus, Nazneen subverts

the very conventional norms that try to limit her freedom: though the hijab imposes the patriarchal norms of Islam on her, she is appropriating these very norms in London by using this garment as a shelter from the male gaze.

Divakaruni, too, touches upon religious themes in her narrative. In *The Mistress of Spices*, she explores Hindu mythology. Tilo, the protagonist of the novel, whose full name is Tilottama, meaning “life giving, health-restoring, and hope” (Suganya and Rajeshwari 30), is a Hindu by birth. According to Hindu legend, Tilottama is the most beautiful apsara⁵² in God Indra’s⁵³ court; of all the dancers, she is the centre of attraction, the jewelry crest (Suganya and Rajeshwari 30-31). From the enchanted land, the “island of spice”⁵⁴ (Divakaruni 24), where Tilo arrives after she escapes from the pirates, she is magically transported to America and is placed in the Indian spice shop, “Spice Bazaar,” through the medium of “Shampati’s Fire.” “Shampati” refers to the “bird of myth and memory, who dived into conflagration and rose from new ash” (Divakaruni 56). The myth of fire indicates “destruction of present physical form and a reduction to ashes” (Mishra 148). Fire also denotes creative energy, divine vision, and awareness of salvation (Suganya and Rajeshwari 32). As portrayed in the narrative, all mistresses have to go through a fire-test on the island of spices to prove their abilities and knowledge. Only after the successful completion of their learning do the mistresses gain salvation. Furthermore, the myth of “Shampati’s Fire” symbolises the rebirth of Tilo, “a literal recreation of the self” (Mishra 148). Due to the reference to fire and rebirth, Shampati can also be read as an “Eastern version of Phoenix” (Mishra 148), the legendary bird in Greek mythology that rose from the ashes. Phoenix, in Greek mythology, is the son of Amyntor, king of Thessalian Hellas. In order to please his mother, he seduces his “father’s concubine” (“Phoenix”). Following a violent quarrel Amyntor curses him with childlessness. Later Phoenix escapes to Peleus (king of the Myrmidons in Thessaly) and is made “responsible for the upbringing of his son, Achilles”⁵⁵ (“Phoenix,”). Similar to the Phoenix’s decomposition before rebirth, Tilo also submits herself to Shampati, which helps her to start a new phase of life over the remnants of her past:

⁵²In Hindu mythology, “apsara” refers to a celestial female creature, or “nymph”. Apsaras are believed to be extremely beautiful and possess supernatural powers.

⁵³In the Hindu legend, Indra is the king of heaven, an ancient Vedic deity.

⁵⁴The readers are informed that the sea serpents have told Tilo about the land of the spices: “The island has been there forever...green slumbering volcano, red sand beaches, [and] granite outcrops like grey teeth” (Divakaruni 23).

⁵⁵As mentioned in Book IX of Homer’s *Iliad*, “Phoenix accompanied the young Achilles to Troy and was one of the envoys who tried to reconcile him with Agamemnon, the chief commander of Greek forces, after Agamemnon and Achilles had quarreled” (“Phoenix”).

“Come Shampati, take me now...This is my atonement. Willingly I undergo it. Not because I have sinned, for I acted out of love, in which is no sinning” (Divakaruni 296-98). The reference to Shampati can be traced back to the Indian mythology of *Ramayana*⁵⁶. Sampati⁵⁷ is the elder son of Aruna and the brother of Jatayu (Mishra 148). He has the form of a vulture. At the time when Sita, the wife of Lord Rama, was forcefully taken away by the demon-king, Ravana, Sampati helped in rescuing Sita (Mishra 148). Similar to Sampati, who is known for his faithful service, Tilo is transported to Oakland to serve the diasporic Indian community. In my reading, Tilo acts as a spokesperson of the repressed, giving voice to those diasporic women who suffer from identity crisis and homesickness in the foreign land. Thus, Tilo becomes a mediator between the cultures of her homeland and the host nation. At the end of the novel, she acquires the name Maya, which means, “[i]llusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day” (Divakaruni 317). Maya is also a “fundamental concept in Hindu philosophy...[it] originally denoted the magic power with which a god can make human beings believe in what turns out to be an illusion. By extension, it later came to mean the powerful force that creates the cosmic illusion that the phenomena world is real” (“Maya”). This name suggests that Tilo-cum-Maya achieves a balance between the two contrasting worlds of the homeland and the host nation with the help of her magical powers. However, it has to be acknowledged that the balance that Tilo acquires through her magical abilities is idealistic to a certain extent. This utopian notion of equilibrium is in contrast with the realistic issues that the novel portrays, for instance, problems faced by the immigrants, sexual oppression, domestic violence, among others, which are represented by Tilo’s customers.

In Divakaruni’s narrative, both Tilo and her lover, Raven, represent a marginalised, subaltern position in mainstream neoliberal culture. In native American myth, the raven is described as a creature associated with “metamorphosis” and “change or transformation” (Mishra 153). In Western mythology, the raven is also considered to be the “bird of death” (Mishra 153). In Divakaruni’s novel Tilo’s lover, Raven, wants to take her away from the

⁵⁶Ramayana: Indian epic (Sanskrit: “Rama’s Journey”) is the shorter of the two great epic poems in India (the other being Mahabharata). Composed in Sanskrit by the poet Valmiki, *Ramayana* describes the royal birth of god Rama and his quest to rescue his wife, Sita from the clutches of Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka (“Ramayana”).

⁵⁷In this chapter, I am using two spellings: “Shampati,” as used by Divakaruni in *The Mistress of Spices* and “Sampati,” the reference to the mythological character as used by the critic Suchita Mishra in “Women Characters in the Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: A Search for Self-Identity”. The spelling “Sampati” is not only used by the critic, it is used in Ramayana, the Sanskrit epic from ancient India, as well.

world of spices to an “earthly paradise” (Divakaruni 314), where they can spend the rest of their lives together. He encourages Tilo to cross the threshold of the spice shop, that is, to overthrow conventional norms and break free from the obligations put on her by the spices. Furthermore, according to native American legends and myths of some tribes, the raven plays a part in the “Creation myth” (Mishra 153): it is believed that the raven escaped from the “darkness of the cosmos” and became the “bringer of light to the world” (Mishra 153). In a similar manner, Raven also brings light to Tilo’s world by giving her a new life and a new identity, which is different from the life she had as a mistress. I believe that he plays a significant role in Tilo’s transformation. It is primarily her love for Raven that instigates Tilo to overthrow her conventional traditions. Thus, myth and Hinduism have a significant impact on the identity of Divakaruni’s heroine, which is less constraining than the impact of Islam on Nazneen in Ali’s *Brick Lane*. Tilo subverts the patriarchal norms that are mythically created by the spices, which I have read as symbols of religious guardians, yet she creates a balance between the spiritual world of Hinduism and everyday reality in the Western city, as her new name, Maya, suggests.

However, Hinduism has a less positive role in Chadha’s films. *Bhaji on the Beach* opens with the appearance of the Hindu god, Vishnu, in the store where Asha, the middle-aged newsagent, works. She is neither happy in her marital relationship nor satisfied with her mundane job. Her discontent with her marriage makes her start an extra-marital affair. With the use of religious symbolism, that is, the appearance of Vishnu, the narrative foregrounds and parodies the god-fearing mentality of South Asian people, especially of men, who believe that exposure to Western culture will interfere with the traditional belief of their daughters and wives. In the second chapter of my dissertation, I have discussed in detail how diasporic women use parody and mimicry to perform acts of subversion. In a similar vein, I read the episodes that evoke religious issues in Chadha’s films as parodistic portrayals in this chapter. Although the male characters try to control their daughters and wives in the name of religion, female protagonists often resist these measures.

This element of control is also evident in *Bend it like Beckham*, which depicts the struggle of a young woman who belongs to a Sikh community. As I have discussed, Jess, the main character of the film, wants to become a professional football player. In contrast to the group of Hindu women in *Bhaji on the Beach*, she has to confront orthodox Sikh norms. For instance, she is asked by her dad to swear on a Sikh god’s (Babaji’s) name so as to prove her innocence when she is mistakenly thought to have kissed a white boy at the bus stop. I would

claim this episode is yet another example of parody. This is because the short-haired character, who is mistaken by Jess' parents for a white boy, is Jules, Jess' female co-player in football. Jules plays an important role in Jess' transformation: thanks to her, Chadha's protagonist is able to win a scholarship to play football professionally and fulfil her dream. Thus, Hinduism and Sikhism, as represented in the films, have a two-fold role: on the one hand, first generation diasporic men use religious norms to restrain the main characters, but, on the other, the female protagonists employ parody to ridicule these very norms.

In contrast to Jess' parents who mistook a boyish, short-haired character for her daughter's partner, Asha is warned by the Hindu god, Vishnu, to "remember who [she is]" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:14:51) when she casually flirts with an English man during her trip to Blackpool. She is constantly reminded about "[d]uty, Honour, Sacrifice" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:15:00) and the importance of upholding her Indian values, along with the images of her as a devoted wife and mother. Therefore, the films depict a clash of religious and cultural beliefs within the diasporic community. According to the rules of Hinduism, as in *Bhaji on the Beach*, and the rules of Sikhism, as depicted in *Bend it like Beckham*, young girls should abide by certain norms: respect their elders, remain virgin till marriage, abstain from smoking and drinking, and so on. However, the younger female characters fail to follow these norms. Though the religious constraints of Hinduism and Sikhism may seem extreme from the perspective of a British audience, in a typical South Asian household, the female characters are familiar with these conventional norms. By introducing several religions and their limitations, the films present and parody these norms of South Asian culture, which eventually complicate the lives of the protagonists in London, even when they are away from their homelands. Chadha's films not only portray the ways in which religions constrain women, then, but, due to the parodistic elements involved in these portrayals, female characters also subvert these very norms.

3.2. Differences Based on Class and Marital Status

Though religion is the most significant factor that delineates diasporic female identities, it is quite evident from the literary and the cinematic narratives that characters can also be divided based on their class and marital status. Ashima in *The Namesake* and Mrs. Sen in Lahiri's short story belong to the middle-class. Their husbands work and study at universities. It is not only because of the academic positions of their husbands in the US that they lead an opulent lifestyle, but also due to the fact that both Ashima and Mrs. Sen are from a well-to-do

family. For example, before her marriage, Ashima has been “working toward a college degree” and she also “used to tutor neighborhood schoolchildren in their homes” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 7). Furthermore, Mrs. Sen mentions to Eliot’s mother that “[a]t home, you know, we have a driver” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 113). In Calcutta, at the time when the narratives were published (*The Namesake* in 2003 and *Interpreter of Maladies* in 1999), higher education for women and personal chauffeurs were largely unattainable, which only the elite could afford. On the contrary, Nazneen and Jasmine belong to the working-class. They are from the villages of Bangladesh and India, respectively. Their fathers worked as labourers. Jasmine’s family could not even afford electricity. Jasmine, for instance, asserts that “[i]n [their] house [they] had to finish eating, cleaning up, sewing, reading, before nightfall. Oil for clay lamps was expensive and not always available” (Mukherjee 44). Both Nazneen and Jasmine have left their homeland to escape from poverty, trauma, and patriarchal oppression. Based on their class differences, the professions that the female characters take up also vary. For instance, Ashima, due to her higher social standing, volunteers at a public library in America and her circle of friends include expatriates of the Bengali community in the US. On the other hand, Nazneen chooses the company of Razia, her rather underprivileged neighbour, and other garment workers in London.

Furthermore, these diasporic characters are also divided based on their marital status, that is, their identities are affected by whether they are married, unmarried or widowed. In the beginning of the narratives, Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Jasmine, and Nazneen are depicted as married women. But as the plots unfold, only Mrs. Sen remains a married housewife: Ashima and Jasmine become widows, and Nazneen leaves her husband, though not officially. Depending on their class and marital status, the degree of these women’s struggle to establish themselves as empowered individuals in the West varies. As the narratives highlight, in the South Asian household, male members are in-charge of making family decisions. For example, in *Brick Lane*, when Nazneen expresses her desire to learn English, Chanu declares: “Don’t worry about it. Where’s the need anyway?” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 37). In another episode, Nazneen is not encouraged to go out of the house without her husband: ““Why should you go out?” said Chanu. If you go out, ten people will say, ‘I saw her walking on the street.’ And I will look like a fool” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 45). Apart from Ali’s narrative, Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* also portrays the ways in which women are bounded by the rules of their patriarchal native cultures. In Divakaruni’s novel, the spices, which represent patriarchal religious guardians, as I have argued, do not allow the mistresses to “touch those” (Divakaruni 6) who

come to the spice store and require them “never to love any but the spices” (Divakaruni 40). Thus, the presence of men in their lives, in this case symbolised by the spices, acts as hindrances in their emancipation, because the female characters are not able to make their own decisions and have to act as their male counterparts require. Therefore, marriage, which is the basis of women’s social recognition in their home countries, hinders their emancipation in the West due to the patriarchal values it embodies.

Moreover, I would also like to point out that although Ashima and Mrs. Sen belong to the same class, that is, to the middle-class, Ashima could only become financially independent after the death of her husband. She also chooses to divide her stay between America and Calcutta, which initially has not been possible for her as Ashoke, her husband, used to make all the decisions. But, till the end of “Mrs. Sen’s” it does not become clear whether the protagonist could learn to drive without her husband’s assistance. Similarly, Jasmine, too, learns to live independently after the demise of her husband as she moves to America. Tilo, who remains unmarried till the end of the narrative, is also able to make her own decisions in the narrative, which is to divide her attention between Raven and the spices without leaving either of them. Thus, it becomes obvious from the narrative plots that first-generation diasporic women are able to make decisions and gain a degree of financial stability after they are either separated from their husbands, like Nazneen, or after the death of their husbands, as in the case of Ashima and Jasmine. Therefore, the class and marital status of diasporic characters become significant factors in the host nation on which their degree of empowerment depends.

3.3. Differences Based on English Language Skills

Within the South Asian diasporic community, language barriers present another “structural problem” (Crenshaw 1249). Language is a mechanism of social inclusion. English language, as represented in the novels and films, becomes the primary mode of communication for the diasporic female characters in the US and the UK. Therefore, a disparity lies between the protagonists depending on their ability to speak English in the host country. In contrast to Tilo and Jasmine, who are portrayed in the narratives as fluent English speakers, Nazneen struggles with the language. Exploring the intercultural encounters that take place in the diasporas, Susan Friedman claims that “the very gap between languages is a creative space in between – on the hyphen” (Friedman 23). Thus, when the diasporic characters acquire a hyphenated identity in the host country, it becomes easier for them to

become empowered if they can communicate in English. Knowledge of English is also a sign of class privilege. More affluent migrants have the means to learn the language, whereas, Nazneen has never been encouraged to speak English. For instance, Lahiri's novel hints at Ashima's knowledge of English even before she moves to the US: "In Calcutta, before she was married...She used to tutor neighborhood schoolchildren in their homes...helping them to memorize Tennyson and Wordsworth, to pronounce words like *sign* and *cough*, [and] to understand the difference between Aristotelian and Shakespearean tragedy" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 7, italics in the original). Lillian Gordon considers Jasmine to be lucky in Mukherjee's narrative because "India had once been a British colony" (Mukherjee 132), and, therefore, she has learnt to speak English. It is clear from the novel that Lillian treats Jasmine in a special way, sharing her daughter's clothes and shoes with her, in comparison to the Kanjobal women who also reside at her place. Thus, Jasmine enjoys a privileged position at Lillian's place because of her ability to converse in English. She also learns to talk like an American. In another episode, she finds it difficult to adapt to the "artificially maintained Indianness" (Mukherjee 145) at Professor Ji's apartment, because she already feels and talks like an American. One of the primary reasons why she moves out of the Professor's place is because she realizes that she is losing her English language skills: "English [is] deserting [her]" (Mukherjee 144). Jasmine sometimes gets the chance to watch a soap opera, otherwise, American channels are not preferred in that house: "There's so much English out there, why do we have to have it in here?" (Mukherjee 144), the Professor's mother asserts. Therefore, Jasmine's preference of English television programmes to Bollywood movies fosters her empowerment in the host culture.

A solid knowledge of English also helps characters participate in the market economy. For instance, Tilo is able to converse in English with her customers in the spice shop in *The Mistress of Spices*. She serves them, delving into their respective requirements, which helps her become a more apt storekeeper. On the contrary, Nazneen in Ali's novel hesitates to talk to anyone, even within the Brick Lane community. She imagines her conversation with the "tattoo lady" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 19), but never dares to visit her apartment as she can say only "two things in English: sorry and thank you" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 19). Thus, due to her inability to speak the language fluently, she lacks confidence in socialising outside the diaspora community. But, at the same time, she puts efforts to improve her language skills: Nazneen "turned on the radio. The radio was tuned to one of Shahana's stations...She sang along, filling her lungs from the bottom, letting it all go loose" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 486-489). As the

radio is tuned to one of the stations her daughter, Shahana listens to, it is evident that Nazneen is listening to English songs, and as she sings along, she is probably trying to improve her verbal communication skills. Unlike Tilo, however, Nazneen does not need to be fluent in English in order to participate in the market economy, since both Karim, her first “employer,” and Razia, her future business partner, are members of the same diaspora community. To become equal in the business with Razia, however, Nazneen would probably need to speak English fluently.

Furthermore, language barrier is one of the reasons that leads to hierarchical differences among diasporic women. As opposed to Tilo, who seems to be confident in her actions in dealing with her customers in the spice shop, Nazneen is forced to endure the depreciating comments of her husband, who drops English words now and then in his conversation. Knowledge of the English language, or the lack of it, gives rise to unequal power relations, as the difference between Nazneen and other women, such as Razia and Mrs. Azad, show: these latter are in a much superior position within the South Asian diaspora community because of their English communication skills. Nazneen feels that she needs to learn English when she is approached by a “brown-faced man” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 60) on the street who tries to talk to her in Hindi, Urdu, and English, and when she says “Sorry” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 61), as she only speaks Bengali, he nods and leaves. Nevertheless, she feels satisfied as she has “spoken, in English, to a stranger” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 61). Even though this is “very little,” it is “something” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 61) for her. As I have argued in chapter two, this interaction acts as a significant turning point in her transformation: according to Ziegler, it signals “the start of Nazneen’s integration in the public sphere” (Ziegler 154). Thus, by the end of the narratives, all three protagonists, Tilo, Jasmine, and Nazneen, become citizens of the global society due to their willingness to communicate in English. Although it has to be foregrounded that in Nazneen’s case language is less crucial as members of the diaspora community, Razia and Karim, for instance, support her to a great extent.

3.4. Generational Clash: Differences Between First- and Second-Generation Characters

Apart from religion, class, marital status, and English language skills, South Asian diasporic characters are also differentiated based on whether they are first-generation immigrants or second-generation immigrants. In this subsection, I will study the two

generations by comparing Ashima and Gogol⁵⁸ as well as Sonia and Moushumi in Lahiri's *The Namesake*; Nazneen and her daughter, Shahana, in Ali's *Brick Lane*; Mrs. Bhamra and her daughter, Jess, in *Bend it like Beckham* as well as Asha and Hashida and Ginder in *Bhaji on the Beach*. It goes without saying that second-generation female characters are more rebellious than their previous generations. But with specific episodes from the narratives, I will also explore the differences between these two generations of characters, focusing primarily on how they relate to their cultural traditions⁵⁹. This is because the practice of native customs is a significant element in the constitution of diasporic identities. In other words, in this chapter I will investigate what "home" is for each generation, how they struggle against conventional norms in the West, and finally, how the intergenerational differences have an impact on the identities of the female characters.

The encounter between the two generations of characters is primarily based on cultural conflicts. When first-generation women move away from their home countries, they also carry their native traditions with them, which they practice within the diasporic space in the West. For instance, Ashima, Nazneen, and Mrs. Bhamra prefer traditional food and clothes to Western dishes and attires. They create an imaginary "home" in the Western metropolis and expect their subsequent generations to adhere to the customs and norms of their native land. The second-generation, however, being born and brought up in the West, cannot entirely relate to their parents' traditions, as they identify more with the host culture, and that is the starting point of the intergenerational clash. For instance, in Ali's narrative, Chanu imposes strict rules on his daughters and requires them to follow Bengali culture: he asks them to recite Bengali poems, wear traditional clothes, and does not encourage them to speak English: "We are not allowed to speak English in this house" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 193), as Sahana asserts. But Shahana strongly detests these practices. She retorts her father by saying that "[she] didn't ask to be born" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 181) in the UK. She does not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali is shocking. She wants to wear jeans and hates kameez. She prefers baked beans to dal. She does not care about the cultural aspects of Bangladesh and does not want to go back (Ali, *Brick Lane* 180). Similar to Shahana, Jess and Moushumi are also pestered by their parents to wear traditional clothes and eat Indian food.

⁵⁸Here, I have included a male character in order to show that it is not only diasporic female characters whose identities transform in the West, but migration has an impact on male characters as well. This needs to be taken into account since I analyse the role of male characters as both obstacles to female empowerment and helpers of women in this dissertation.

⁵⁹I will further explore the significance of home culture in the fourth chapter of my dissertation. See page 98.

For example, during her wedding, Moushumi wears a gown her mother does not approve:

[she wears a] red Banarasi gown with spaghetti straps, something she'd designed herself...She wears the gown in spite of her mother's protests – what was wrong with a salwar kameez, she'd wanted to know – and when Moushumi happens to forget her shawl on a chair and bares her slim bronze shoulders...her mother manages, in the midst of that great crowd, to shoot her reproachful glances, which Moushumi ignores. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 222-23)

In a similar manner, Jess' mother scolds her for wearing sportswear, which exposes her bare legs in Chadha's film. In another episode, she is forced to wear traditional Indian attire at her elder sister's wedding. Thus, first-generation women in most of the cases strongly disapprove of their children's adoption of Western cultural norms and practices. It is my contention that this disapproval is an expression of first-generation immigrants' struggle to preserve their memories and cultural traditions in the West.

Furthermore, Ashima, Nazneen and Mrs. Bhamra are obsessed with traditional food, which is evident from their extensive culinary preparations. For instance, on Gogol's fourteenth birthday, which is said to be a "tame affair with pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 72), his own friends are invited a day before to have a "proper" American celebration. I believe Gogol prefers to celebrate his birthday with his American school friends. He is more accustomed to American culture than to Indian traditions. Although it is ironical that during his birthday celebration with his American friends, they consume pizza, which is a typical Italian cuisine, yet it is popular in the US. But for Ashima and Ashoke, his parents, the actual celebration is the Bengali one, where his mother "cooks for days beforehand, cramming the refrigerator with stacks of foil-covered trays" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 72). Yet, Ashima thinks "[a]ll this is less stressful to her than the task of feeding a handful of American children, half of whom always claim they are allergic to milk, all of whom refuse to eat the crusts of their bread" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 72). These female characters are not only obsessed with their culinary art, but they also compel their children to learn to cook traditional dishes, as Mrs. Bhamra does in *Bend it like Beckham*, for instance, who urges Jess to learn to cook a full course Indian meal.

However, despite parental pressure, the successive generations are more attracted to the lifestyle of the host culture. They oppose the customs and norms of their parents and are not ready to give in easily. Nazneen's daughter, Shahana, for instance, objects to the rules that

her father imposes on her in *Brick Lane*: “it’s his stupid rule in the first place!...What do I care? I hate him. I *hate* him” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 193-94, italics in the original). In my reading, the second-generation characters are not only rebellious, but they are also bolder than the previous generations. Similar to other narratives, Chadha also highlights the boldness of second-generation migrants in *Bhaji on the Beach*. Asha, one of the first-generation Indian characters who travels to Blackpool, seems to be dissatisfied with her marriage and flirts with an English man, Ambrose, during the trip. But she is not courageous enough to divorce and thus constantly has the illusion that the Hindu god, Vishnu, is telling her to obey to rules: “Remember who you are” (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 01:14:49). In contrast to Asha, Hashida and Ginder, two second-generation migrants on the bus, are firm in their decisions; Hashida decides to go for an abortion as she is not ready for the child yet, and Ginder divorces her abusive husband. In a similar manner, Moushumi, Jess and Sonia, all of whom are members of the second generation, are also determined in their actions. By the end of the narratives, Moushumi divorces Gogol and moves to Paris, Sonia marries the man she loves, and Jess chooses football as her profession. Therefore, it is apparent from the narratives that while the first-generation women search for a middle-ground between the traditions of the East and the West, the next generations tend to choose the host culture over their parental legacy.

4. Solidarity Despite Intersectional Differences

In addressing the global subordination of women, Brah points out that “[s]ince gender inequalities pervade all spheres of life, feminist strategies have involved a challenge to women’s subordinated position within both state institutions and civil society” (Brah 103). It is this subordination, which is the shared experience of women, that leads to the formation of communities and solidarity. Diasporic female characters in the narratives also develop a sense of community, which results from their shared lived experiences, such as their subordinated position in a male-dominated society, or their everyday struggle against conventional norms. When South Asian women move to their new home, each one of them reaches some sort of crossroad in relation to their identity and sense of belonging. While raising their voices against the patriarchal restrictions, these women transcend their national, cultural, and religious differences in order to support each other. In other words, despite their intersectional differences, diasporic women often help each other due to their shared experience of subordination. Probing into this question in the chapter titled “Is Sisterhood Global?,” Brah also asserts that “[i]t is now widely accepted that ‘woman’ is not a unitary

category. The question remains whether it can be a unifying category” (Brah 89). She points out that the slogan “Sisterhood is Global,” which was used in the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s, failed to acknowledge that women do not belong to a homogeneous category, rather, they are differentiated as “‘working-class women’, ‘peasant women’ or migrant women” (Brah 102), among others. Brah believes that “it is possible to develop a feminist politics that is simultaneously local and global...[but] it calls for the development of political practice which appreciates how and why the lives of different categories of women are differently shaped by articulating relations of power” (Brah 89). Thus, there remains a tension between the position of women due to intersectional differences and the idea of global sisterhood based on solidarity and the recognition of these differences.

Furthermore, the notion of “universal sisterhood,” as proposed by Robin Morgan⁶⁰, is criticised by Mohanty. She claims that the term, “universal sisterhood,” which is defined as “the transcendence of the ‘male’ world” (Mohanty 116), ends up “being a middle-class, psychological notion that effectively erases material and ideological power differences within and among groups of women, especially First and Third World women” (Mohanty 116). In opposition to this utopian idea, Mohanty proposes the concept of solidarity, which involves the following features:

mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis of relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances. (Mohanty 7)

The narratives I analyse often evoke the idea of solidarity. Though the difference between First and the Third World female characters is always evident, not unlike the unequal power relations that characterise their positions in the host countries, Western characters are often helpful, and there is a sense of sisterhood that exists between them. In Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and in Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham*, for instance, white Western women help the female protagonists who either come from the Third World, such as Jasmine, or, who are second-generation migrants, for example, Jess in Chadha’s

⁶⁰Robin Morgan wrote the book titled *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology* (1984).

film. In *Jasmine*, Lillian, Kate, Karin, and Mother Ripplemeyer support and guide Jasmine throughout the narrative. They help her both financially and emotionally in the host nation. They find her jobs, encourage her to live with the man of her choice, and also share their “Depression stories” (Mukherjee 16) with her, which reveals a sense of empathy:

I could tell [Mother Ripplemeyer] about water famines in Hasnapur, how at the dried-out well docile women turned savage for the last muddy bucketful. Even here, I store water in orange-juice jars, plastic milk bottles, tumblers, mixing bowls, any container I can find. I’ve been through thirsty times, and not that long ago. Mother doesn’t think that’s crazy. The Depression turned her into a hoarder, too. She’s shown me her stock of tinfoil. She stashes the foil, neatly wrapped in a flannel sheet, in a drawer built into the bed for blankets and extra pillows. (Mukherjee 16)

Similar to American women who make Jasmine’s life comfortable in the United States, Jules, an English woman in Chadha’s film, supports Jess to fulfil her dream. She recruits her in the local football team so that, in the future, Jess can play the game professionally.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that sisterhood cannot be taken for granted; it is not a universal given, it needs to be worked for. Working on the recognition of intersectional differences is part of this project, as without this recognition First World women might simply impose their own norms on Third world women as they are trying to “help” them, turning the idea of sisterhood into another form of oppression. For instance, in Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine’s stories often make American women feel “uncomfortable,” (Mukherjee 16) despite their best efforts to help her. Mother Ripplemeyer, for instance, is unable to picture her birthplace:

In the beginning, I thought we could trade some world-class poverty stories, but mine make her uncomfortable...It’s like looking at the name in my passport and seeing ‘Jyo-’ at the beginning and deciding that her mouth was not destined to make those sounds. She can’t begin to picture a village in Punjab...I have to be very careful about those stories. I have to be careful about nearly everything I say. If I talk about India, I talk about my parents. (Mukherjee 16)

Mother Ripplemeyer finds it difficult to imagine a village in Punjab but “doesn’t mind [Jasmine’s] stories about New York and Florida because she’s been to Florida many times and seen enough pictures of New York” (Mukherjee 16). Both women are considerate towards the other, and Mother Ripplemeyer is willing to listen to Jasmine’s stories, but she prefers to hear stories about New York and Florida, which are places she is familiar with. Jasmine also feels she needs to be very careful about what she says and talks about her family instead of political or cultural issues. In other words, it is difficult for Mother Ripplemeyer to connect with Jasmine on a deeper level exactly because of the intersectional differences between them. But empathy, recognition, and the willingness to listen to each other also characterise their interactions.

Highlighting the significance of empathy⁶¹ in the context of intersectionality and feminist solidarity, Alison Bailey points out that empathy “suggests that one woman can have knowledge of another woman’s suffering because that suffering has similar features to her own” (Bailey 29). . Nevertheless, it cannot be disregarded that empathy “fails to make visible the matrices of domination that foment ignorance by concealing how racism, sexism, or colonialism sometimes play women against one another” (Bailey 30). This failure also characterises Jasmine’s relationship with American women, despite their good intentions. She shares little about her life with both Mother Ripplemeyer and Lillian Gordon, the woman who rescues her after she is raped in the motel, and these women find it difficult to imagine her life outside America as well: I was no threat, and I was in need. The world’s misery was a challenge to her ingenuity” (Mukherjee 131). In spite of this lack of deeper connectedness, Lillian, nevertheless, similar to Mother Ripplemeyer, provides her support: she calls a doctor to sew Jasmine’s tongue (Mukherjee 131). Thus, the sense of solidarity that exists between women is precisely due to empathy in *Jasmine*, though the apparently genuine acts often based on unequal power relations, since empathy “allows women with power and privilege to equate their experiences with women most unlike them” (Bailey 30).

The interactions between diasporic characters are also characterised by unequal power relations, although these are not as significant as between First and Third World women. In Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Razia plays a very significant role in Nazneen’s bildung. She helps her to find work in garment-designing business after Nazneen leaves both Chanu and Karim and

⁶¹Empathy requires “people to have enough knowledge or experience with the other’s life conditions to accurately imagine being in their circumstances...Knowledge of another’s circumstance, self-reflection, and empathy require good listening skills” (Bailey 28).

needs to find a way to sustain herself and her children: “without Razia there would be no money at all, because Karim had disappeared...[Nazneen] prayed to God, but he had already given her what she needed: Razia” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 484). With her supervision and guidance, Nazneen finally becomes financially independent. She gradually realises that she is capable of surviving in the host nation, and neither financially nor emotionally requires the support of a man. But the difference between Razia and Nazneen has to be acknowledged: when Nazneen arrives in London, Razia is already financially stable and lives as an independent woman in London, who is outgoing and fluent in English. Similar to Ali’s novel, in Mukherjee’s narrative, apart from Lillian, Kate and Mother Ripplemeyer, Nirmala, the daughter-in-law of Professor Ji, also helps Jasmine: “Nirmala brought plain saris and salwar-kameez outfits for [Jasmine] from the shop so [she] wouldn’t have to embarrass [herself] or offend the old people in cast-off American T-shirts” (Mukherjee 144). However, there is a difference between them: Nirmala is in a more privileged position in America compared to Jasmine; she works in “a sari store” and lives in “a little corner of heaven” (Mukherjee 144). Chadha’s film, *Bhaji on the Beach*, also depicts instances of solidarity and sisterhood among diasporic characters: Simi, the bus-tour organiser, encourages Hashida to opt for an abortion to deal with her secret pregnancy, and Asha suggests Ginder to file a divorce to get over her unsuccessful marriage. Although they are empathetic towards the subsequent generations, it is also a challenge for Indian women such as Simi and Asha to support tabooed issues like abortion and divorce. Thus, the recognition of intersectional differences, such as generational difference in this case, becomes fundamental when it comes to solidarity among diasporic women. The unity among these female characters is “best understood not as given, on the basis of a natural/psychological commonality, it is something that has [been] worked for, struggled toward – in history” (Mohanty 116). Hence, both Western and diasporic female characters strive to acknowledge and respect the distinctiveness of fellow women. Genuine communication, especially between Jasmine and American women, however, often becomes difficult due to intersectional differences. But as I have pointed out, empathy requires “acknowledgement” (Bailey 31) that is, the “voices and experiences of those suffering must be [a] part of the conversation” (Bailey 31) among the characters in the narratives I analyse.

Although female solidarity is a recurrent theme in all the narratives, it has to be foregrounded that some male characters also act as catalysts in the empowerment of women. There is a significant change in the relationship of men and women in the narratives that I explore. I would claim that despite the general pattern that male characters impose

patriarchal norms on diasporic women, there are examples when men support the female protagonists both emotionally and financially, challenging stereotypical notions that diasporic women can only rely on their sisters for help. For example, Karim, the young boy who delivers sewing material to Nazneen, Jess's football coach, Joe, and even, Eliot, the kid whom Mrs. Sen babysits, support the protagonists in different ways. Though these instances are rather exceptional, some male characters provide encouragement for the female protagonists to fulfil their dreams and help them to gain agency. This is often expressed in the form of empathetic listening. Being constantly demeaned by her husband, Nazneen, for instance, finds solace in Karim's presence. He listens to her and takes her seriously, lending books and sharing ideas with her. Similar to Karim, who encourages Nazneen, Joe, in *Bend it like Beckham*, guides and supports Jess to learn football. He even confronts her father who does not want to allow her to play football professionally and accept the scholarship. Though Eliot cannot help Mrs. Sen in the practical sense of the term due to his young age, he fosters her empowerment by becoming her constant companion and empathetic listener. From her culinary skills to driving lessons, the young boy witnesses all. Therefore, both male and female characters support the protagonists in their *bildung* and become a significant part of their journey towards empowerment in the narratives. Therefore, it is clear from my textual analysis that diasporic women can be supported despite the intersectional differences that exist among them. However, the recognition of these differences is the basis of genuine support. Even though the narratives depict neoliberal exploitation realistically they tend to believe in one-to-one interactions and solidarity, which can challenge the stereotypes and norms imposed on the characters.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how identities are formed and narrativised in the South Asian diasporic context. Apart from investigating female identities, I have also focused on how male identities are transformed, as in the case of Gogol and Ashoke in *The Namesake*. The unique naming tradition in Bengali culture, that is, the difference between good name and pet name, which is a significant aspect of identity formation in Lahiri's novel, has also been explored. I have shown that South Asian diasporic women are not a homogeneous group. Relying on Crenshaw and Brah, I have explored the intersectional differences that characterise these women. With the help of close reading, I have investigated the differences based on religion, class and marital status, their ability to speak English, and finally, the differences between the attitudes of the first and the second-generation of female characters,

which have an impact on the identity formation as well as the degree of empowerment of the diasporic protagonists. As I have argued, religion is the most significant aspect of diasporic female identity. It is evident that characters face different issues based on whether they are Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. With specific episodes from the narratives, I have shown the ways in which Muslim and Sikh characters, such as Nazneen and Jess, have to bear religious obligations, which are more difficult to deal with than the norms imposed on their Hindu counterparts, such as Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*. My chapter has also analysed the class hierarchy among the female characters, exploring how a middle-class background, as in the case of Ashima and Mrs. Sen, or, a working-class origin, such as Nazneen's and Jasmine's, impacts their positions in Western societies. I have also argued that the extent of agency women gain varies depending on their relationship status. This is because some of the male characters, Chanu, Ashoke and Mr. Sen for instance, act as a hindrance in the process of female empowerment. I have highlighted this in the comparative analysis of Ashima, Nazneen and Mrs. Sen. While Ashima and Nazneen have been able to make their own decisions only in the absence of their husbands, in the case of Mrs. Sen it has remained ambiguous till the end of the short story whether she could drive on her own without her husband's assistance.

Furthermore, I have argued that English language skills are significant for diasporic women on two levels. On the one hand, English is a medium that fosters their inclusion in the host country, and, on the other, it significantly helps them participate in the neoliberal market economy. Integration into the host culture becomes easier if the characters are fluent in English, as in the case of Jasmine and Tilo, in contrast to Nazneen, who has been initially shy and hesitant to converse with her neighbour. I have also explored the differences between the first and the subsequent generations of diasporic characters. It is apparent from my analysis that first-generation women are stuck between their native traditions and the new customs of the host nation. They have been unable to discard their traditions completely, and thus opt for a hybrid ground to merge practices from both home and host cultures. But the subsequent generations are more inclined towards the Western culture and for them the host country, which is their land of birth, holds an upper hand.

The final part of this chapter has investigated the notion of solidarity. In the broader context a sense of sisterhood exists among the female characters. In fact, it is not only the female characters who are supportive towards each other, but some male characters, such as Karim, the delivery guy in *Brick Lane* and the football coach, Joe in *Bend it like Beckham*,

also play a significant role in the main characters' bildung. However, I have probed further into the unequal power relations between the characters, for instance, the difference between Jasmine, who comes from a Third World country and Mother Ripplemeyer and Lillian Gordon, who are from the First World. Based on my analysis, it can be concluded that solidarity characterises the interactions of female characters, which is mostly due to the empathy that entails acknowledgement and compassion beyond borders. Solidarity also depends on the recognition of intersectional differences, which, despite the best efforts of characters, often proves to be difficult in Mukherjee's novel. I would contend that the recognition of these differences is rather an idealistic goal than a reality in *Jasmine*. Besides analysing the role of intersectional differences between First World and Third World women, this chapter has also shown that it is crucial to recognise these differences in the case of diasporic characters as well. In Chadha's film, first-generation Indian women offer their support to the second-generation characters on issues related to abortion and divorce, which are taboos according to Indian norms. The compassion that first-generation characters show obviously comes with challenges. In this case, recognising the age gap between the characters becomes essential. Hence, the narratives imply that characters need to work on recognising intersectional differences in order to achieve a degree of solidarity.

CHAPTER 4

“Home and Homelessness”: Nostalgia and the Impact of Culinary Arts on Female Identity

1. Introduction

Displacement, especially if it is forced, has an affective impact on immigrants. The experience influences how one might not feel “homely” (Ahmed 341) due to the trauma of displacement. In the fourth chapter of my dissertation, I focus on the conflict between “home” and “homelessness,” which is a common theme in diasporic literatures. This tension has an impact on the identities of the female protagonists in my selected narratives. The continuous transformation of migrants’ identities challenges their sense of belonging to any tangible place; as John McLeod claims, “[t]hey can be deemed not to belong there and disqualified from thinking of the new land as their ‘home’” (McLeod 212). The impact of displacement is not only physical, it is also psychological. The emotional and psychological turmoil that immigrants undergo make them feel rooted in their past, and it can lead to alienation, melancholia, and nostalgia. As migrants long for their homeland, they “love, hate, fear, panic, resent, envy, mourn, cheer, complain, etc. within a different emotional register than the host country” (Dancus 250). The yearning of these diasporic people commences them to recreate a “home” away from home. The relentless efforts of first-generation female characters to preserve their cultures, mostly through memories, clothes, and food, is akin to Avtar Brah’s notion of “homing desire” (Brah 189), defined as a wish to recreate “home” in the diasporic space yet simultaneously critiquing discourses of “fixed origins” (Brah 189).

The struggle to preserve native traditions is highlighted through the practices of the female protagonists, for example, Mrs. Sen’s yearning for Indian fish in Lahiri’s short story, “Mrs. Sen’s”; Ashima’s recreation of a Bengali street snack in *The Namesake*; Nazneen’s preference to wear traditional Bangladeshi clothes and follow her religious norms in *Brick Lane*, and Mrs. Bhamra’s obsession of teaching her daughter to prepare Indian meals in *Bend it like Beckham*. It is also to be acknowledged that there is an obvious difference between the first and the second-generation female characters in the very way they relate to the notion

of “home.” This is because the following generation is unable to connect with the place that is “home” for their parents’. Therefore, in the narratives, Jess, Sahana, Moushumi and Sonia cannot empathise with the struggle that their parents, Mrs. Bhamra, Nazneen and Ashima, undergo in the West. In this chapter, I will investigate how the concept of “home” is constructed in the diasporic narratives, foregrounding the ways in which food, letters and music, for instance, Ashima’s and Mrs. Sen’s obsession with their traditional dishes in Lahiri’s narratives, the exchange of letters between Nazneen and her sister in *Brick Lane*, and Mrs. Bhamra’s preference for Punjabi music in *Bend it like Beckham*, become significant symptoms of the characters’ homing desire. The concept of homing desire also acknowledges the pain that is involved in the journey and the process of settling down; the struggle between the routes and the roots that immigrants confront in their day to day lives. Focusing on the role displacement plays in the construction of a “home” between the Eastern and the Western cultures, I will explore how the longing of the female protagonists, that is, their yearning to preserve their native traditions in the host nation, contributes to redefining their identities. Although I will discuss various means, such as letters, music, and stories, through which they enact their pining for home, my primary focus will be the role culinary art plays in forming and transforming diasporic female identities.

2. Diasporic Women as Bearers of “Home” Cultures

In describing the stereotypical role of women in the South Asian household, Yasmin Hussain points out that “[c]ulture is not genetically inherited but is instilled by upbringing within a given cultural context or a given set of parallel contexts, within which an individual has to learn about such ideas as race and gender” (Hussain 3-4). The role of South Asian women is encapsulated by the responsibilities that her culture assigns to her. In this cultural context, there are certain requirements an ideal woman (daughter or wife) needs to fulfil: she is expected to remain within the inner space of the house, as I have discussed earlier, take care of the household, look after her husband and children, and refrain from participating in decision making. Female characters, such as Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Jasmine and Nazneen are portrayed as typical South Asian women when they settle in Western cities, conforming to the norms of their home culture. However, Jasmine is an exception: unlike others who accompany their partners, she moves to the US following the death of her husband, which already suggests that her attitude towards her home culture will be rather different. For the South Asian women questioning authority is not an option: “If God wanted us to ask question, he would have made us men” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 80), as Rupban in *Brick Lane* asserts. It is striking that the narratives normalise the customs and traditions followed by these female characters, which show that South Asian women are accustomed to most of these regulations since their childhood, and they learn the rest of the rules after marriage. The image of the ideal woman is so strong that these women try to conform to and represent these repressive cultural norms even after they move to the West.

The impact of migration is unpleasant and disheartening for women because of moving away from the world they are familiar with and settling down in an unknown land. The pressure on the women to adjust in the new environment is due to the fact that, on the one hand, these women are expected to maintain connections with their homeland and its religious and cultural traditions, and, on the other hand, they have to undertake “new roles and demands” (Clifford, “Diasporas” 313-14) to become members of the global community. The immigrant women are doubly oppressed, first, as second-class citizens, and secondly, as members of the diasporic community. They struggle with “material and spiritual insecurities” (Clifford, “Diasporas” 314), deal with demands of family and work, and also with the “claims of old and new patriarchies” (Clifford, “Diasporas” 314). All the literary novels and films that I analyse highlight how the female characters initially struggle with these issues: on the one hand, Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, Asha in *Bhaji on the Beach* and Jess in *Bend it like Beckham* struggle to fulfil their dreams after they arrive to the West, yet they are also bound by the social and religious norms of their families. Similarly, Ashima in *The Namesake*, Mrs. Sen in “Mrs. Sen’s” and Tilo in *Mistress of the Spices* try to abide by their familial norms after they migrate to the US.

Within the South Asian diasporic community, men are endowed with the task of bread-winning and women with the role of home-making. The stereotypical role assigned to male and female members of the diasporic society predominantly affects the identity of women. Even though they move away from their home countries, diasporic women are still identified as someone’s daughter, wife or mother, and are seen as bearers of native traditions. The lack of individual identity is best portrayed in Lahiri’s short story, “Mrs. Sen’s”: the protagonist is addressed throughout the narrative as someone’s missus and not by her first name.

As diasporic women are displaced from their homelands, they are caught between the need to affirm their cultural identities as well as to transcend the limitations of native traditions. Highlighting the conflicting struggle of displaced immigrants, critic such as Eline Versluys relies on Daniel Baggioni and Jean Kasbarian to point out that diasporic women are caught between two types of identities: personal and collective (Versluys 89). Similar conflicts characterise the identities of the female protagonists that I analyse. Some of the characters, for instance, Mrs. Sen and Ashima, can feel their “individualism to a greater extent” (Lau 247) when they are in their homeland for them the term “home country” does not only refer to a geographical location but it also evokes strong familial ties. It is also to be foregrounded that while some diasporic women feel alienated in the host nation since they are away from their family members, this detachment can also be seen as a safe haven, which brings about a relief from the interference and pressure of their conservative family members. In *Jasmine*, for instance, the first-person narrator comments on the situation of old women in her home country as follows: “In Hasnapur...The sad story would be a woman Mother Ripplemeyer’s age still working on her shell, bothering to get her hair and nails done

at Madame Cleo's" (Mukherjee 15). In another episode, the narrative sheds light on the excruciating pain that widows undergo in India, which still recalls the practice of sati⁶²: "When Pitaji died, my mother tried to throw herself on his funeral pyre. When we wouldn't let her, she shaved her head with a razor, wrapped her body in coarse cloth, and sat all day in a corner. Once a day I force-fed spoonfuls of rice gruel into her" (Mukherjee 61). In contrast to Jasmine, who is fortunate enough to move to America from Punjab and escape the miserable condition that widowed women suffer there, Lahiri's protagonists, Ashima and Mrs. Sen, love to be in their home countries. Similar to Ashima, who cannot imagine giving birth to her child without her parents or grandparents being near, for Mrs. Sen, "home" refers to Calcutta where the time seems to have stopped after she has moved to the US. Thus, though the narratives of the South Asian diasporic writers highlight the need to affirm some aspects of the cultural traditions related to the homeland of the characters, it is also obvious that women need to overthrow the limitations that are associated with the traditions and practices of their home countries.

3. Recreation of "Home"

The notion of "home" is a recurrent theme of diaspora literature. As Brah points out, "home" is the lived experience" (Brah 188) of a particular locality. For the diasporic women, the concept of "home" marks the "varying experiences" of the "pains and pleasures," the "terrors and contentments," or "the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture" (Brah 189) that remind them of the moments that they have spent with the people in their homeland. Migrants feel the need to recreate a home-like experience in the host countries, which manifests as "homing desire" (Brah 189). Brah defines homing desire as follows:

The homing desire is . . . not the same as the desire for a 'homeland'. Contrary to general belief, not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return. Moreover, the multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporian subjectivity is 'rootless'. I argue for a distinction between 'feeling at home' and declaring a place as home. Processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars par *excellence* of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process. The relationship between the two is subject to the politics in play under given sets of circumstances. In other words, the concept of diaspora refers to *multi-locationality* within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries. (Brah 194, italics in the original)

Brah's notion of homing desire is not the same as the desire for the homeland one has left as it critiques discourses of fixed origins. This means that Mrs. Sen, who insists on her fixed origins and

⁶²Sati or Suttee (in Sanskrit it means "good woman" or "chaste wife") is the Indian custom of a wife immolating herself either on the funeral pyre of her dead husband or in some fashion soon after his death ("Suttee"). This practice is also discussed in Gayatri Spivak's famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

remains stuck in a nostalgic view of her homeland, is different from other female protagonists who recreate traces of their home countries in the host nation. The notion of “home” is fixed throughout Lahiri’s short story: “Everything is there” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 113) in Calcutta, she asserts. In other words, she idealises her home country and feels detached in the US. The narrator’s detailed description of Mrs. Sen’s apartment shows her detachment from her new home very clearly:

The lobby was tiled in unattractive squares of tan, with a row of mailboxes marked with masking tape or white labels. Inside, intersecting shadows left by vacuum cleaner were frozen on the surface of a plush pear-colored carpet. Mismatched remnants of other carpets were positioned in front of the sofa and chairs, like individual welcome mats anticipating where a person’s feet would contact the floor. White drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa were still wrapped in the manufacturer’s plastic. (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 112)

Mrs. Sen never feels at home in the shabby apartment: in contrast with her nostalgic memories of Calcutta, the unattractive tiles, the simple tapes on mailboxes and the “shadows” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 112) left by the vacuum cleaner evoke feelings of estrangement and alienation. Her displacement from Calcutta to the US results in an unhomey situation: she is expected to negotiate, erase and blur the boundaries between the inside and the outside, that is, her home and host nation, and between her past and present, in order to integrate into the host culture. As opposed to this expectation, however, the short story portrays her isolation in her apartment. Even after residing in America for quite some time, she is unable to part with her native customs and traditions as she refuses to acknowledge that India is no longer her physical home. Her dissatisfaction with her new environment is also evident when she discloses to Eliot, the eleven-year-old American boy whom she babysits, that “[h]ere, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 115). The silence that Mrs. Sen complains about is the result of the absence of her family members and the memories associated with her near and dear ones.

In contrast to Mrs. Sen, who holds on to her fixed origin, the way Ashima and Nazneen feel about their home countries can be read as examples of Brah’s notion of “homing desire” (Brah 189). As I argue in this chapter, the way these characters recreate traces of their home culture in the diasporic environment showcases “multi-locationality” (Brah 194). They suffer from affective displacement and nostalgia, which produces frustration and disappointment. This anguish is not only due to a physical displacement but also to a psychological one, which is a result of the separation from their family members. Therefore, in order to recreate traces their native traditions in the host country, female characters use letters, recorded cassettes, clothes and food, for instance. In the following subsections, I will explore in detail the different practices through which diasporic female characters try to preserve and recreate their “home” culture in the West.

3.1. Recorded Cassettes and Letters

I have discussed in the earlier section how the main characters of *The Namesake* and “Mrs. Sen’s” represent different attitudes towards the notion of “home”: while Ashima divides her stay between Calcutta and Boston by the end of the narrative, Mrs. Sen remains stuck with her nostalgic memories of India and never really feels at home in America. However, despite this difference, there are similarities between them since they both use recorded cassettes to relive the moments with their family members in their home countries. When Mrs. Sen accompanied her husband to the US, her relatives have presented her a cassette recording as a farewell gift:

she played a cassette of people talking in her language...As the succession of voices laughed and said their bit, Mrs. Sen identified each speaker...The final voice on the tape belonged to Mrs. Sen’s mother. It was quieter and sounded more serious than the others. There was a pause between each sentence, and during this pause Mrs. Sen translated for Eliot: “The price of goat rose two rupees. The mangoes at the market are not very sweet. College Street is flooded.” She turned off the tape. “These are the things that happened the day I left India.” The next day she played the same cassette all over again. (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 128)

The above recording may seem trivial, but for Mrs. Sen, it is priceless. Her unceasing desire to listen to the recorded cassette ascertains that she “positions her own existence in the past, as if it were frozen in time, stuck in the movements and contexts in which these events were produced” (Cavalcanti 6). Although she hardly communicates with anyone in the US, it is not only her Indianness which causes alienation, she also feels lonely since she rejects American culture. The cassette serves as a relief to overcome her solitude. It replays the events which happened on the day of her displacement from India. Her desire to play the cassette “all over again” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 128) the next day can be read as a reassurance that she seeks in order to make sure that everything remains intact in her homeland, the way she has last seen them.

Similar to Mrs. Sen, Ashima too carries with her the memory of her Calcutta home. This memory helps her to retain her experiences of her childhood that she spent with her family members as well as the cultural heritage of the homeland. Emphasising the significance of memory in the diasporic context, Nicola King quotes Peter Nicholls: “[t]o remember is...not simply to restore a forgotten link or moment of experience, nor is it unproblematically to ‘repossess’ or re-enact what has been lost” (qtd. in King 12), but, at the same time, memory gives direct access to the “preserved or buried past” retaining a “powerful hold on [the] culture” (King 12). As for Ashima, her “only link to home is by telegram” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 25) in *The Namesake*. After her

displacement from Calcutta, she suffers from a sense of alienation as she is unable to detach herself completely from the memories of her homeland. Furthermore, apart from being a link to her homeland, letters also become a medium of recollecting native traditions for Ashima. Letters play an important role in the naming of Ashima's first-born child, Gogol. As discussed in chapter three, in a typical Bengali household, it is a ritual to give two names to a child: a good name or "bhalo naam" and a pet name or "daak naam." During Ashima's pregnancy, her grandmother mails a letter which contains "one name for a girl, one name for a boy" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 25). But unfortunately, the letter never reaches them. Therefore, I argue that the letter, or, rather, the absence of it, suggests that on the one hand, it becomes a medium for the diasporic woman to remain connected to her homeland, but on the other hand, it is akin to Brah's claim that home is a "mythic place" where the diasporic subject can never return (Brah 188-89). Nevertheless, Ashima's efforts to preserve all the letters and gifts that she has received from her parents and family members indicate that her dislocatedness makes her more nostalgic about India. Although Calcutta is a mythic place for both Ashima and Mrs. Sen where they cannot return, their approach towards the notion of "home" is different: while Mrs. Sen remains emotionally stuck in her homeland, Ashima, by the end of Lahiri's novel, is able to cross the "psychic boundaries" (Brah 194) of her home country along with the "territorial" (Brah 194), as "she is [no longer] the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 276) due to her emotional flexibility.

Letters have a significant symbolical role in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* as well. The narrative highlights the female protagonist's connection with her home country, Bangladesh, through the exchange of letters with her sister, Hasina: "What was Hasina doing? She went to the bedroom and opened the wardrobe. The letter was in a shoebox at the bottom. She sat on the bed to read it" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 24). The letters remind Nazneen of her homeland. Even though she is in her Brick Lane apartment, her mind is constantly occupied with nostalgic memories of Bangladesh and her family members, especially her younger sister. In my reading, Nazneen keeps the letters in a shoebox at the bottom of the wardrobe not only to hide them from her husband, Chanu, who does not seem to like Hasina, but this act also suggests that the letters are stored in a safe corner in Nazneen's memories. Though the exchange of letters between the sisters is present throughout Ali's narrative, chapter seven of *Brick Lane* specifically focuses on the letters from Hasina to Nazneen. The first letter is sent in May 1988 with Hasina mourning after the death of Raqib, Nazneen's first-born child. With the help of the letters the readers are informed about Hasina's life in Bangladesh: she is an independent and rebellious woman, quite the opposite of Nazneen. Unlike Nazneen, who marries the man of her father's choice, Hasina elopes with the man she loves, but later leaves her violent husband. In contrast to her elder sister, who submits to her fate in the beginning of the narrative, Hasina takes her fate into her own hands, yet, apparently, she cannot escape it either. Her letters highlight the oppression she experiences in Bangladesh, based on gender and class. Although

Hasina is defiant and financially independent, she becomes a victim of patriarchal oppression, even to the extent of being raped. The chapter concludes with her letter, dated January 2001, informing Nazneen about her current employment status as a maid. Thus, in *Brick Lane*, the role of letters is two-fold: on the one hand, letters establish a connection between the homeland and the host nation and participate in recreating traces of Nazneen's home culture in London, but, on the other, gaining insight into Hasina's life through the medium of letters helps readers understand why Nazneen becomes less attached to Bangladesh, as Hasina paints a grim picture of her homeland. Furthermore, the letters also shed light on the traumatic experiences of the protagonist as a consequence of her mother's suicide, which I will discuss in the final chapter of my dissertation.

3.2. Clothes and Music

The desire to preserve "home" culture is also evident in female characters' preference of traditional clothes and music even when they are away from their home countries. These characters can be divided into two groups based on their choice of clothing: first, women who are comfortable only in their traditional attire, for instance, Mrs. Sen and Ashima, and the second group includes second-generation immigrants, such as Shahana in *Brick Lane*, Jess in *Bend it like Beckham*, Moushumi and Sonia in *The Namesake*, and Ladhu and Madhu in *Bhaji on the Beach*, who have a strong dislike for traditional clothes. However, the first group is rather heterogeneous: on the one hand, Nazneen, who wears sari in the novel, finds it difficult to abandon her native customs as she interiorises patriarchal norms, but on the other, female characters, such as Mrs. Azad and Razia in *Brick Lane* and Rekha in *Bhaji on the Beach* fuse Western fashion with their traditional ones, which represents their in-between status as first-generation migrants. These different attitudes towards traditional clothing showcase "the problematic quest for identity of immigrants, and also, the appreciation of the profound implications of clothing for the purposes of integration within the postcolonial space of migration" (Germanà 74). In other words, for the diasporic female characters, traditional clothing is usually an obstacle in the process of integration, though they sometimes may use these clothes for subversive purposes, as Nazneen's act of skating in a sari showcases. Instances of resistance against, as well as obsession with, native clothes are evident in my selected works. In contrast to Chadha's protagonist, Jess, who is criticised by her mother for exposing her legs to the world, Lahiri's main character, Mrs. Sen, continues to wear sari, even when she is in the US, and the lack of opportunity to wear the traditional Indian clothing upsets her:

She flung open the drawers of the bureau and the door of the closet, filled with saris of every imaginable texture and shade, brocaded with gold and silver threads. Some were transparent, tissue thin, others as thick as drapes, with tassels knotted along the edges. In the closet they were on hangers; in the drawers they were folded flat, or wound tightly like thick scrolls. She sifted through the drawers, letting saris spill over the edges. "When have I ever worn this one? And this? And this?" She tossed the saris one by one from the

drawers, then pried several from their hangers. They landed like a pile of tangled sheets on the bed. (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 125)

The pile of unworn saris in the cupboard symbolises Mrs. Sen’s resistance to American culture. She is reluctant to relinquish her past and is caught up between two contrasting worlds. Similar to Mrs. Sen, Ashima, too, prefers her traditional attire; she still “wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 276). During her pregnancy she experiences a significant cultural shock when she is required to remove her clothes in the hospital: “She is asked to remove her Murshidabad silk sari in favor of a flowered cotton gown that, to her mild embarrassment, only reaches her knees” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 2). Thus, the literary and the cinematic narratives showcase the obligation diasporic women feel to perpetuate their cultural traditions in the host nation. The dichotomy between the first- and the second-generation of immigrants towards the native customs and norms highlights the way their identities transform within the diasporic space.

Clothes are also represented as expressions of homing desire in Chadha’s films. The differences in the choice of clothes result in a cultural conflict between the two generations. For first-generation women, such as Mrs. Bhamra and the elderly group of women, Asha, Pushpa and Bina, traditional clothes not only represent a piece of attire, rather, they are a marker of their homing desire. This evokes the stereotypical Indian concept that women are bearers of home culture and thus, the way they dress reflect their cultural identities. At the very beginning of *Bend it like Beckham*, Mrs. Bhamra seems to be annoyed with her daughter’s sporty outfits. She is not pleased to see her daughter revealing her bare legs, as she thinks that by exposing her body Jess is bringing shame upon the family. In another episode, when both daughters, Jess and Pinky, are getting prepared for the latter’s wedding, Mrs. Bhamra decides what they should wear and also explains how they should wear their clothes. The sisters have different tastes: while Pinky likes fashionable tight jeans and accessories, Jess prefers tracksuit. In contrast to the sisters, who belong to the South Asian diasporic community, Jules, a white English⁶³ woman, who plays football with Jess, is constantly urged by her mother to wear more feminine outfits. She even goes to the extent of selecting undergarments for her daughter so as to increase her sexual appeal. She also wants her daughter to behave in a more “womanly” way and ridicules her by saying that no one will want to marry a girl who has muscles. Thus, the narratives depict that while all the first-generation female characters in *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Bend it like Beckham* prefer to wear traditional Indian attires, the successive generations are more comfortable with Western trends of fashion. But it has to be mentioned that there is an exception: in *Bhaji on the Beach*, Rekha, a glamorous visitor from Bombay, is portrayed feeling more comfortable in Western dresses than in traditional Indian clothes. Perhaps the role of Rekha’s character in the narrative is ironical: a visitor from Bombay,

⁶³The presence of the white English woman suggests that gender is as important an issue in the film as race: the English girl experiences rather similar problems, even if the cultural pressure is different.

India, is more westernised than the group of elderly women, who have been cherishing their Indian cultures in the UK for decades. Therefore, it is evident that although clothes become an expression of homing desire for the first generation diasporic women, subsequent generations often discard these garments, which results in a cultural conflict.

Venting out her distaste of Western culture, Asha in *Bhaji on the Beach* remarks that she has tried to teach her daughter “morals from back home” to which Rekha replies, “[h]ome? What home? How long is it since you’ve been home? Look at you! Your clothes, the way that you think...You’re twenty years out of date” (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:41:28). As represented in the narratives, clothes become a means through which the female characters mediate between the home and the host nation. While the first-generation women are fond of their traditional attires, for the second-generation characters, wearing traditional outfits is a means through which they maintain ties with their parental traditions. Jess, for instance, wears Punjabi clothes during her sister’s wedding so as to conform to her parental culture and please her mother. At the same time, the younger females choose Western clothes, and these choices are often influenced by the jobs and hobbies they do: Pinky wears a short skirt since she is an airhostess and Jess puts on sports shorts since she is a football player. Similar to Jess and Pinky, Ladhu and Madhu, in *Bhaji on the Beach*, are wearing Western pants during their day trip to Blackpool. Therefore, even though clothes become a part of homing desire for the first-generation women, they act as a medium of subversion for the subsequent generations.

Maintaining ties with the homeland is further expressed through the choice of traditional music. Both Western and Indian music are used in the films. While in *Bhaji on the Beach*, the Punjabi version of the English song, “Summer Holiday,” appears, *Bend it like Beckham* portrays the Hindi version of the song, “Feeling Hot Hot Hot.” Moreover, on the way to their road-trip to Blackpool, the female characters sing in Punjabi, which is their traditional language. I would contend that the homing desire of the diasporic characters can also be subversive. As Yasmin Hussain argues, by the introduction of South Asian “themes, music and language” have enriched British cinema (Hussain 16). The cultural majority has been, in fact, transformed by the presence of, and encounters with “the other,” which Hussain calls “desification⁶⁴” (Hussain 16) of British cinema. Drawing on Hussain’s argument, I claim that by relying on Indian versions of the English songs, the films subvert Western culture. This desification of music is also represented in the Bhamra household in London in *Bend it like Beckham*. Mr. Bhamra is obsessed with traditional music and during the evenings he and his wife watch television programmes in Indian languages. Through the introduction of traditional music, the narratives recover the cultural traditions of the South Asian diasporic community, recovering their own hidden histories, as Hussain puts it: “These

⁶⁴“Desification” means transforming something into a native cultural tradition, where “Desh” in Hindi means country or land. In Chadha’s narratives, desification refers to the fusion of British and Asian culture.

musical forms are important for the South Asian...culture, as they cut across nationalities, religion, caste or class” (Hussain 6). Chadha’s films, then, rely both on Western and Eastern music, producing a hybrid effect, which represents the efforts of female characters to preserve cultural traditions within the diasporic space. Thus, music, similar to clothes, becomes the medium through which home culture is preserved, and which subverts traditions of the host culture.

3.3. Religion

Religion is a significant cultural marker for South Asian diasporic women. As my chapter on intersectionality showcased, it serves as a key element in the formation and development of diasporic identities in the narratives I have analysed. In this subsection, I argue that religious practices can also be read as manifestations of homing desire. As Penny Logan points out: “many adults reported that they had become more aware of their religion in Britain, as a result of belonging to a minority group in a predominantly irreligious society. They could no longer take their religion and their children’s assumption of it for granted” (qtd. in Vertovec 285). The significance of religious practices is evident in the cases of Divakaruni’s protagonist, Tilo, Ali’s main character, Nazneen, and Chadha’s female character, Asha in *Bhaji on the Beach*.

For diasporic women, religious identities, as R. Stephen Warner argues, “often (but not always) mean more to [individuals] away from home, in their diaspora, than they did before, and those identities undergo more or less modification as the years pass” (Warner 3). In my reading, the transformation of religious belief from god-fearing to less institutionalised and more empowering forms is represented in the character of Tilo. At the beginning of *The Mistress of Spices*, she is portrayed as a passive individual obeying the rules of her religion, in this case, the commands of the spices, symbolised as her keepers in the narrative: “‘Remember this too: Tilottama, disobedient at the last, fell. And was banished to earth to live as a mortal for seven lives. Seven mortal lives of illness and age, of people turning in disgust from her twisted, leprous limbs.’ ‘But *I* will not fall, Mother.’ No hint of shaking in my voice. My heart is filled with passion for the spices” (Divakaruni 43, italics in the original). But by the end of the narrative, she reconciles with Hindu spiritualism, which is no longer experienced as a controlling discourse: though Tilo breaks some of the rules which have been assigned to her by the spices, she does not discard them completely.

The god-fearing mentality of diasporic women is also portrayed in *Bhaji on the Beach*. Though the larger-than-normal image of the Hindu god, Vishnu, which appears at the beginning of the film, is parodistic, as discussed in the second chapter of my dissertation, it evokes a connection with native cultural traditions: Asha is repeatedly warned by the Hindu god to “know [her] place” (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 0:02:10) and to remember who she is, her “duty, honour [and] sacrifice” (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:14:46). But towards the end of the film she revolts: “I

have not done anything wrong...I went to college, my life was not meant to be like this...Duty, honour, sacrifice, what about me? I was a good singer at college...and I wasn't born selling bloody newspapers" (Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* 1:14:51). In contrast to Chadha's narrative, the role of religion is more ambiguous in *Brick Lane*. Though the narrative does not portray religious admonitions like Chadha's films, Nazneen is meticulous in her prayer: "she picked up the Holy Qur'an from the high shelf...She made her intention as fervently as possible, seeking refuge from Satan with fists clenched and fingernails digging into her palms. Then she selected a page at random and began to read" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 19). The novel outlines the significance of religion through the protagonist's constant engagement with the Holy Book:

She put the Qur'an back in its place. Next to it lay the most Holy Book wrapped inside a cloth covering: the Qur'an in Arabic. She touched her fingers to the cloth...And then, because she had let her mind drift and become uncentred again, she began to recite in her head from the Holy Qur'an one of the suras she had learned in school. She did not know what the words meant but the rhythm of them soothed her. Her breath came from down in her stomach. In and out. Smooth. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 21)

Though Nazneen practices her religious duties, she does not entirely surrender to them. The way she reads the Qur'an, selecting random pages, suggests that she is making the religion her own: instead of following norms imposed on her, she reads the Holy Book in order to find solace, recalling "one of the suras she had learned in school" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 21). These reminiscences suggest that homing desire is also expressed through religious feelings in *Brick Lane*. Thus, religion remains one of the central issues in the narratives of Ali, Divakaruni and Chadha. Based on my analysis, it can be understood that religious sentiment becomes an aspect of the diasporic characters' homing desire. But as I have argued, protagonists, such as Tilo and Nazneen, for instance, who follow their traditions diligently, do not succumb to religious norms, rather, they transform their religious beliefs into more empowering attitudes.

Furthermore, the generation gap that exists between the characters has to be foregrounded. Second- and third-generation migrants typically have a different attitude towards religion, as Vertovec points out:

Issues of religious and cultural reproduction naturally raise questions concerning the maintenance, modification or discarding of religious practices among the subsequent generations born and raised in post-migration settings. Everyday religious and cultural practices, religious nurture at home and religious education at school, and participation at formal places of worship all shape the identities and activities of the so-called second and third generations. (Vertovec 284)

For the subsequent generations in the West, it is quite difficult to connect to parental traditions. Rather, they associate more with the host culture. Vertovec lists some of the "conditioning factors"

that affect “identity and activity among second and third generation youth” (Vertovec 284), which distinguish them from their immigrant parents: “education in Western schools and the inculcation of secular and civil society discursive practices; youth dissatisfaction with conservative community leaders and religious teachers who do not understand the position of post-migrant youth...compartmentalization of religion...and immersion in American/European popular youth culture” (Vertovec 284). Instances of religious differences between first and second-generation characters are portrayed in *The Namesake*. During Gogol’s school trip to a graveyard, he “goes from grave to grave with paper and crayon in hand, bringing to life one name after another” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 70). But his mother is terrified by the idea of a field trip to a graveyard: “only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art. What’s next, she demands to know, a trip to the morgue? In Calcutta the burning ghats are the most forbidden of places, she tells Gogol...‘Death is not a pastime’” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 70). But Gogol, who is unable to follow his mother’s religious traditions, becomes attached to the paintings that he makes there:

these ancient Puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America...have spoken to him, so much so that in spite of his mother’s disgust he refuses to throw the rubbings away. He rolls them up, takes them upstairs, and puts them in his room, behind his chest of drawers, where he knows his mother will never bother to look, and where they will remain, ignored but protected, gathering dust for years to come. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 71)

For Gogol, the field trip is not merely a part of his school project, rather, wandering amidst the tombstones he realises the uniqueness of his name: “he has never met another Gogol” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 70). He feels a spiritual connection with the “ancient Puritan spirits” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 71) for “reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 71). I would also argue that this trip in Lahiri’s narrative portrays the struggle that second-generation migrants undergo, oscillating between the host culture and their parents’ home traditions. In other words, Gogol is unable to grasp the difference between crematoriums in Calcutta and graveyards in America. Different responses to religion are portrayed in *Brick Lane* and *Bend it like Beckham* as well. Though the religious beliefs of the protagonists are different, since Jess is Sikh and Sahana is Muslim, they are both forbidden to wear Western attire as it is considered inappropriate by their religious parents. But both of them rebel against their parents’ commands. Thus, religious sentiment is rather an aspect of homing desire in the case of first-generation migrants; as rebellion against these norms become more manifest, subsequent generations tend to develop a different attitude towards religion. I have shown how some of the protagonists, Nazneen and Tilo, for example, transform their religious norms: they neither discard the norms completely, nor do they surrender to the pressure imposed on them. On the contrary, second-generation characters, who cannot relate to their parents’ traditions, often refuse to participate in the religious practices performed by their parents in the narratives I analyse.

In addition to the differences in religious beliefs between first- and second-generation characters, the radicalisation of subsequent generations is also evident in my selected narratives. For instance, Karim in Ali's novel, epitomises the "stereo typification of Islamic radical found in the Western discourses of the East" (Khan et al. 171). In contrast to the first-generation characters, such as Chanu and Dr. Azad, who prefer to "adopt a more secular and Western way of life" (Khan et al. 171) the subsequent generations seek "refuge in a radical and politicized form of Islam to counter white racism and cultural marginalization" (Khan et al. 171-72). With the progression of the narrative, Karim "morphs into a radical Islamist" (Khan et al. 171), which is mirrored in the change of his appearance:

Karim had a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts and trainers went as well...Karim put on panjabi-pyjama and a skullcap. He wore a sleeveless fleece and big boots with the laces left undone at the top. The fleece and the boots were expensive...When he took off the fleece he laid it down with care. The boots had to be unlaced in just the right way, neither too high nor too low. (Ali 376)

The generation gap between the characters is also evident when Chanu surrenders all his dreams and returns to Bangladesh, but Karim, on the contrary, joins the "Bengal Tigers," an Islamic activist organisation, and strives for a revolutionary change for the diasporic Muslims in London. Therefore, my analysis suggests that the clash in religious values between first- and subsequent generations may surface in different ways: subsequent generations often tend to discard religious practices, as the example of Nazneen's daughters show, but they also may drift towards radicalisation,

as

Karim

does.

3.4. Impact of Culinary Art on Female Identity

Culinary art, such as cooking, preparing meals, and serving food, plays a significant role in maintaining connections with one's homeland. Therefore, I argue that culinary practices can be regarded as the most significant manifestations of homing desire in the narratives explored in this dissertation. For the South Asian diasporic women, food is not only associated with their gastronomy, but it "constitutes a memory that enables diasporic communities to recollect their specific pasts, their familial surroundings and most importantly their roots" (Assella 109). In some cases, diasporic women associate specific types of food with specific people and situations. The type and consumption of food among the diasporic community also vary based on their race, class, culture and ethnicity.⁶⁵ In the host land, one of the techniques that diasporic women rely on to keep their home culture alive is the preparation and consumption of their traditional food. Even in the absence of authentic ingredients, they insist on cooking traditional food, though they have to modify the old recipes. While in *The Namesake* Ashima tries to recreate a snack from Calcutta with substitute ingredients that are available in the US, Mrs. Sen is frustrated about the unavailability of the right kind of fish that she used to consume in her homeland in Lahiri's short story. Food is portrayed as a "central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations" (Mannur 7) in these narratives; as Anita Mannur puts it, culinary practices even have an impact on the language of everyday life: "the culinary in the US and the UK-based popular culture signals the multiple ways in which everyday Indianness is scripted with the language of consumption and culinary practices" (Mannur 7). Therefore, for the diasporic female characters, culinary art, that is, cooking food, preparing the ingredients and serving the meal, represents cultural ties to their homeland: through these culinary practices they try to fulfil their homing desire.

In the world of culinary art, the position of a woman is culturally and socially associated with the domestic sphere. In a traditional South Asian household, a woman is expected to remain in the kitchen, which is the storehouse of food. She is supposed to cook and provide nourishment to her family by putting warm meals on the table. The asymmetrical power relation between men and women is also reflected in how they relate to food. Carole Counihan and Steven Kaplan, for instance, assert that "there is the power that society allocates or denies to men and women through their access to and control of one essential resource: food. Men's and women's ability to produce, provide, distribute and consume food is a key measure of their power" (Counihan and Kaplan 1). Exploring how female identity is based on her culinary skills in the West, Counihan further argues that authors such as Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr (1988) and Marjorie

⁶⁵South Asian cuisine consists of a wide variety of regional and traditional dishes. This variety is based on climate conditions, soil type, culture, religion, etc. For example, Bengali people are fond of eating fish. While Hindus avoid consuming beef (it is believed that cow is the sacred animal in Hinduism), Muslim people are prohibited to eat pork by their religion.

DeVault (1991) see the role of women as a “mixed bag” (Counihan and Kaplan 4): women within the family provide their husbands and children “with meals, clean [the] house” and keep them “happy” and satisfied (Charles and Kerr 1-2). The image of women “caring - doing for others - is a powerful one. It signals a central element...of what [women] should be...[but the] image feeds misogyny as well: it can stimulate fear of the controlling, potentially manipulative power of the caring [women]” (DeVault 1). Thus, on the one hand, the roles imposed on them can become a potential source of power, since women have the ability to provide or deny food to their husbands and children, but, on the other hand, this is linked to the subordination of women as they are bound to serve and satisfy their husbands (Counihan and Kaplan 4). This is evident in the narratives analysed in this dissertation as well. While Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* has the privilege to exert power over men by the spices she gives them, depending on her customers’ requirements, Nazneen in Ali’s *Brick Lane*, is mostly seen within the four walls of her kitchen at the beginning of the novel, preparing substantial meals for her husband and children, and also entertaining guests, such as Dr. Azad. Hence, women both prepare food and control its distribution, which can be experienced as subjugation and empowerment at one and the same time.

Though culinary art is mostly associated with the subordination of women, food, paradoxically, can act as a source of empowerment against the patriarchal ideas that oppress women. Foregrounding the impact of food on the identity of women, Nyman and Gallardo claim that sometimes food becomes “the only way of expression for women from whom patriarchal society has denied any other means of communication” (Nyman and Gallardo 69). Culinary art is a representation of the crossing of the threshold of conventional norms for the women, both literally and metaphorically. This is because through their culinary skills, these women can release themselves from patriarchal domination, and they also dare to physically step out of the kitchen to buy ingredients, for instance, Mrs. Sen, who dislikes driving cars, but is ready to drive alone, without her husband’s assistance, to get fresh fish from the seaside. Food is a recurrent motif in all my selected works. Lahiri, Chadha, and Ali portray the everyday life of diasporic women, who perform their usual culinary duties in the kitchen. Furthermore, it is observed that second-generation immigrants, such as Moushumi and Sonia in *The Namesake*, who initially express a strong distaste for traditional Indian cuisine and prefer American food to Bengali dishes, later learn to prepare Indian recipes. Thus, though female characters are relegated to the kitchen due to patriarchal norms, food also becomes a medium of resistance as it enables the characters to become more empowered within the diasporic space.

The trope of food and other culinary arts are also intimately connected with memory, ethnicity, and nostalgia in *The Namesake*, which eventually impact the ways in which diasporic identities transform. Lahiri’s narrative opens with Ashima standing in the kitchen of her Central Square

apartment trying to recreate a typical Bengali snack⁶⁶ with the ingredients available in her American kitchen. She combines “[r]ice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl [adding] salt, lemon juice, thin slices of chilli pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 1) but as usual “there’s something missing” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 1). Ashima’s effort to recreate a street snack typical of Calcutta is a manifestation of Brah’s notion of “homing desire” (Brah 189), which shows that she is yearning to recreate a home-like situation in her US apartment. In Lahiri’s novel, the acts of Ashima do not only reveal her individual yearnings, but the knowledge she shares about the culinary practices of her home culture help other women in the diasporic community. The South Asian wives in the US, “homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice, and she tells them about the carp that’s sold in Chinatown, that it’s possible to make halwa from Cream of Wheat. The families drop by one another’s homes on Sunday afternoons. They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 38). Ashima’s daughter, Sonia, too, learns to cook the traditional Indian dishes: Ashima teaches her to “cook the food Sonia [has] complained of eating as a child” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 279). In my reading, Sonia’s interest in cooking Indian food showcases her desire to reconnect with her parental roots. Lahiri’s novel, then, represents how culinary practices of diasporic characters can help them relive their memories of their homeland. However, it is not only first-generation immigrants who recreate their traditional dishes in the West, but second-generation immigrants, as seen in the case of Sonia, sometimes also relate to their parental culture through food.

Culinary practices also have a significant role in Ali’s narrative. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen is portrayed as always busy in the kitchen, preparing long, complex meals:

She should be getting on with the evening meal. The lamb curry was prepared. She had made it last night with tomatoes and new potatoes. There was chicken saved in the freezer from the last time Dr. Azad had been invited but had cancelled at the last minute. There was still the dal to make, and the vegetable dishes, the spices to grind, the rice to wash, and the sauce to prepare for the fish that Chanu would bring this evening. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 19)

Like a typical Bangladeshi household where women receive the smallest share of food, Nazneen eats after feeding her husband and children, and manages with whatever is left. Sometimes she is shy eating in front of Chanu, and sneaks into the kitchen in the middle of the night to eat her dinner. Nazneen’s culinary skill is also depicted when she goes on an outing with her family. Despite being

⁶⁶This Bengali snack is called as “jhaal muri,” which literally translates as spicy puffed rice. It is a tasty and popular street snack in Calcutta, which is generally made with puffed rice and other tidbits such as boiled potatoes, roasted peanuts, onions, tomatoes, spice powders and herbs. It is usually mixed with mustard oil; salty and tangy in flavour.

outdoor, she plays the role of an ideal wife and mother feeding and nourishing her husband and daughters:

They sat on the grass in St. James's Park and Nazneen laid the picnic out on four tea towels. Chicken wings spread in a paste of yoghurt and spices and baked in the oven, onions sliced to the thickness of a fingernail, mixed with chillies, dipped in gram flour and egg and fried in bubbling oil, a dry concoction of chickpeas and tomatoes stewed with cumin and ginger, misshapen chapattis wrapped while still hot in tinfoil and sprinkled now with condensation, golden hard-boiled eggs glazed in a curry seal, Dairy Lea triangles in their cardboard box, bright orange packets containing shamelessly orange crisps, a cake with a list of ingredients too long to be printed in legible type. She arranged them all on paper plates and stacked up the plastic tubs inside the carrier bags. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 297)

The detailed portrayal of food in the narrative makes it obvious that Nazneen is dedicated to her culinary art. She puts immense effort in preparing the dishes and through this she constantly recreates the “localised senses of home” (Nyman and Gallardo 17) within the Brick Lane community. Though these performances help Nazneen connect with her home culture, they also show how she persistently tries to fit in the roles of a perfect daughter, wife and mother, as is expected from a woman by society.

Similar to Ashima and Nazneen, Mrs. Sen's ever-present nostalgia for India is also showcased by her elaborate culinary performances. Besides cooking and the preparation of meals, “flavors and smells” (Pazo 109) of food also evoke long-lasting memories of her homeland: as James Gilroy observes, “it is our most delicate and seemingly fragile senses, those of taste and smell, which are the most persevering and zealous keepers of our past experiences” (Gilroy, J. 101). The narrative represents food as a cultural signifier (Caspari 246), since it evokes Mrs. Sen's home culture, as well as a source of physical nourishment and sustenance. Mrs. Sen takes refuge in culinary art to dissipate homesickness, an attempt to negotiate her nostalgic feelings.⁶⁷

Each afternoon Mrs. Sen lifted the blade⁶⁸ and locked it into a place, so that it met the base at an angle. Facing the sharp edge without ever touching it, she took whole vegetables between her hands and hacked them apart: cauliflower, cabbage, butternut squash. She split things in half, then quarters, speedily producing florets, cubes, slices, and shreds. She could peel a potato in seconds...While she worked she kept an eye on the

⁶⁷To emphasise the relation between food and memory in diaspora narratives, Paula Torreiro Pazo argues that “the evocative and emotional power of food, as a cultural artefact, continues to be the backbone of many Asian-American narratives of migration and displacement, in which the characters, frequently described as deeply nostalgic and homesick, ‘eat in order to remember’” (Pazo 110).

⁶⁸The blade that Mrs. Sen uses is a typical Indian cooking tool, known as “Bonti”. *Bonti*, is a Bengali term for a curved blade used to chop, peel or dice vegetable, fish or fruit. It is a common cooking tool found in both rural and urban parts of Calcutta. Bengali women perform the task of chopping or peeling by sitting on the floor or standing. In her work, Chitrita Banerji mentions that this tool is “associated with Bengali women, and the image of a woman seated at her bonti, surrounded by baskets of vegetables, is a cultural icon” (Banerji 24).

television and an eye on Eliot, but never seemed to keep an eye on the blade. (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 114)

Mrs. Sen’s culinary art signifies that she is proud of her cultural traditions, because her preparation of Indian snacks for Eliot’s mother reveals her desire to show Indian culture to an American woman: “Each evening she insisted that his mother sit on the sofa, where she was served something to eat: a glass of bright pink yogurt with rose syrup, breaded mincemeat with raisins, a bowl of semolina halvah” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 118). She preserves the culture of her homeland in the host nation through these practices, which reveal her homing desire.

As it has been discussed in chapter two, Mrs. Sen’s journey to the market to buy fish is an important turning point in the short story. Fish, in fact, plays a significant role in Mrs Sen’s everyday life as it is a “tool for nostalgia” (Mitra 185) and has the power to make her feel sentimental. It can even be read as a symbol of “Bengaliness,” as Krishnendu Ray points out (Ray 155).⁶⁹ What makes Mrs Sen unhappy is the unavailability of the right kind of fish in the US:

‘I can never find a single fish I like, never a single.’ Mrs. Sen said she had grown up eating fish twice a day. She added that in Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head. It was available in any market, at any hour, from dawn until midnight. (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 123-24)

Her dissatisfaction with the types of fish available in the US is not only a food-lover’s struggle, it is rather a cultural issue which shows an immigrant woman’s desire to keep her native culture alive in the diaspora.

In contrast to the great efforts that Mrs. Sen puts in preparing her meals, Eliot’s American mother opts for readymade food. The narrator reveals that after reaching home from her office, the first thing that Eliot’s mother does is to pour a glass of wine and eat bread and cheese, and later order pizza. The reference to wine and cheese, and the fact that she consumes them in a rush, evokes her everyday life in the neoliberal city, where people have less time and energy to prepare food. After the day’s work at her office, however, it is understandable why Eliot’s mother, who raises her child alone, has no energy to prepare meals. The narrator also reveals that the only occasion when she makes an effort to prepare something is when she invites a man from her workplace to dinner: “a man who’d spent the night in his mother’s bedroom, but whom Eliot never saw again” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 123). This is a revealing episode in Lahiri’s narrative: on the one hand, this event, which is, apparently, a one-night stand, suggests that she has a hectic life and lack

⁶⁹In *Migrant’s Table* (2004), Krishnendu Ray associates fish with diasporic Bengali people, claiming that it is not only a literary image but also a cultural and social issue: fish, along with rice, is the most enduring and potent symbol of “Bengaliness” (Ray 155).

of work-life balance, on the other, it is clear that Eliot is a quiet and helpless victim, who is likely to be affected by these events. This episode also explains why he is drawn to Mrs. Sen, who offers some kind of constancy and emotional stability in the face of this shallowness and lack of stability. Eliot also recognises that the type of food that these two female characters prefer vary widely, as his mother discloses her dislike for Mrs. Sen's concoctions. Thus, from Eliot's point of view, food represents human bonding: the labour that Mrs. Sen puts into preparing a meal can be read as a loving gesture of an Indian mother, which shows the difference between her and Eliot's emotionally unavailable mother clearly.

Similar to Ali's and Lahiri's narratives, food is also a marker of cultural difference in the films of Chadha. The absence of native food in the host country commences the urge to cook traditional meals, suggesting that food has an emotional significance for Chadha's characters as well. To highlight the connection between food and emotion Thahiya Afzal and Kalyani Mathivanan quote Terry Eagleton that "[i]f there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food – it is endlessly interpretable – materialised emotion" (qtd. in Afzal and Mathivanan 256). In other words, food is not only connected to one's culture and traditions, it also expresses emotional attachments. Furthermore, besides having an emotional significance, food is also associated with one's identity. In *Bend it like Beckham*, Mrs. Bhamra believes an ideal woman is able to cook proper Punjabi food. Jess, her daughter, nevertheless, challenges this view: "Anyone can cook aloo gobi.⁷⁰ But who can bend a ball like Beckham?" (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 0:23:15). While Mrs. Bhamra has a rather reductive view of women's role, which is exemplified by her attitude toward Punjabi food, Jess, a second-generation character, is caught between her parental expectations and her own aspirations. Although by the end of Chadha's film, Jess is able to pursue her passion, which is playing football professionally, her mother is more relieved that she has "taught her full Indian dinner, [and the] rest is up to God" (Chadha, *Bend it like Beckham* 1:39:31). This act of Mrs. Bhamra hints at the hybrid position that South Asian diasporic women occupy in the host nation, which is symbolised by the traditional food they prepare with substitute ingredients, and which is also akin to the hybrid identity they have in the West.

The significance of food is already emphasised in the title of *Bhaji on the Beach*. The term "bhaji"⁷¹ (Mendes 332) refers to fried snack in India. The image of the group of Indian women eating their traditional food at Blackpool, a typical English holiday resort, foregrounds their yearnings for their homeland in the West. Moreover, food as a representation of home culture appears in the scene where Pushpa and Bina season their fish and chips with Indian spices, which I

⁷⁰"Aloo gobi" is a Hindi term which means potato-cauliflower. It is a traditional Indian vegetarian dish which is made into a curry with potato, cauliflower, and spices.

⁷¹"Bhaji" is the "collective name given to side dishes usually of vegetables, which are served as an accompaniment to the main course" (Mendes 332).

have read as an act of mimicry earlier. This act does not only reveal these characters' homing desire, it also subverts English traditions in a rather assertive way, as I have argued. Furthermore, in both films of Chadha, the preparation of food and eating along with the family members are stereotypical communal events: for example, the wedding of Pinky where all the family members gather and eat, the group of women at the seaside who eat their home-cooked food together, and the family lunch and dinner at Ginder's in-laws' house. Via the symbol of food, then, and the preparation and consumption of traditional dishes, these films reinscribe the place of Asians in Britain, challenging rigid boundaries between cultures.

In contrast to all the heroines in my selected narratives who constantly try to recreate their traditional dishes in the West, Mukherjee's protagonist is an exception. Jasmine, in fact, distances herself from everything that is Indian, for instance, clothes, memories, and cultural norms, and she turns to her traditional dish only to challenge American people's view of Indian food: "I took gobi aloo to the Lutheran Relief Fund craft fair last week. I am subverting the taste buds of Elsa County. I put some of last night's matar panir in the microwave. It goes well with pork, believe me" (Mukherjee 19). The irony that is present in Mukherjee's narrative is that even though Jasmine detests her connection to the past and detaches herself from her cultural traditions, she does not completely discard her native culinary practices. The people who have come across the protagonist in America are used to her concoctions, "even if they make a show of fanning their mouths" (Mukherjee 9), they get "disappointed if there's not *something* Indian on the table" (Mukherjee 9, italics in the original). Although she consciously rejects her native traditions, she remains emotionally connected to them, as her attitude toward food shows. Mukherjee's narrative does not provide definite reasons as to why the protagonist continues to prefer Indian food and keeps preparing it in the US, while she otherwise abominates all her native customs. Perhaps Jasmine is in denial due to the traumatic events she has experienced before she moved to the US,⁷² which might explain why her attachments surface via "safer" channels, one of which is her native culinary practices.

Food, therefore, becomes one of the significant manifestations of homing desire. I have analysed how female protagonists, Ashima, Nazneen, Mrs. Sen and Mrs. Bhamra, for instance, cook traditional dishes even when authentic ingredients are absent. Though some of the second-generation characters, such as Moushumi and Sonia, learn to prepare the food their parents made, Jess, on the contrary, challenges her mother's view that an ideal woman should be able to cook traditional food. Besides the association of food with memories and nostalgia from the lost homeland, it also represents human bonding, as is seen in the case of the American boy, Eliot. Furthermore, with the medium of traditional food, diasporic women also subvert Western norms, as the act of seasoning French Fries with Indian spices in Chadha's film reveals. In the final part of

⁷²I will discuss the significance of trauma in Mukherjee's novel in the last chapter. See page 126.

this subsection, I have suggested that native culinary practices may even become a safe channel to release emotional anguish for migrants who experienced traumatic events, such as Jasmine, and who otherwise distances themselves from their home culture.

4. “Home”: A Place for Human Emotions and Attachments

In this chapter, I have primarily dealt with the recreation of South Asian native traditions in the West and the different means, such as letters, recorded cassettes, music, clothes and food, women utilise to preserve their home culture. In this sub-section I will emphasise how “home” becomes a site of human emotions and attachments for both diasporic and native characters in the West.

As I have mentioned, for Mrs. Sen and Ashima, “home” refers to Calcutta, a place where they feel the warmth of their family members. Similarly, I have also shown how Eliot, the focaliser in Lahiri’s short story, feels at home in Mrs. Sen’s apartment, where he experiences warmth and tenderness. In contrast to Mrs. Sen’s apartment, which is nice and warm, the tiny beach house where Eliot and his mother stay at the end of the narrative is “already cold; [they have] to bring a portable heater along whenever they [move] from one room to another” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 113-14). The differences between these two houses reflect Eliot’s relationship with the two female characters. Although he behaves as a mere guest at Mrs. Sen’s place, he always feels the affection in her behavior and never misunderstands her, which is in contrast with the relationship that he has with his mother. But at the same time, Eliot finds it strange that Mrs. Sen, who is otherwise very loving and kind, does not display her emotions for her husband. She always refers to him by his surname⁷³, “Mr. Sen,” as if “they [were] only distantly acquainted” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 112) and “disobeying some unspoken rule between them” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 118). Therefore, Lahiri’s narrative suggests that human feelings and emotions are significant aspects which make a place “homely.”

To further establish the connection between human emotions and the notion of “home,” let me elaborate on the role of Eliot in the short story. Eliot has been a constant companion to Mrs. Sen: he has been a witness to her obsession with her home culture, primarily, cooking, and also her difficulties with driving. Having spent a lot of time at Mrs. Sen’s apartment, the child is exposed to a new culture, which is rather different from his own. However, he does not share this new experience with his mother, which is yet

⁷³It is a custom in many Bengali households that a wife is not supposed to address her husband by his first name and mostly uses a nickname or refers to him as her child’s father.

another sign of their strained relationship. Even though Eliot is able to recognize Mrs. Sen's innermost feelings, he prefers to hide this knowledge:

When, eventually, his mother asked him in the car if he'd noticed a change in Mrs. Sen's behaviour, he said he hadn't. He didn't tell her that Mrs. Sen paced the apartment, staring at the plastic-covered lampshades as if noticing them for the first time. He didn't tell her she switched on the television but never watched it, or that she made herself tea but let it grow cold on the coffee table. (Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's" 128)

Although the American boy is not familiar with Mrs. Sen's cultural background, he can grasp her emotional turmoil. However, his choice of not revealing his experiences to his mother hints that he knows intuitively that his mother will not be able to understand the vulnerable position of the Indian woman, so far away from her homeland. This is yet another sign that shows how problematic his relationship with his mother is. Gradually, Eliot begins to identify with Mrs. Sen. He becomes aware of his own needs and feelings. It is not only Mrs. Sen who suffers from loneliness and depression, then, but the short story also foregrounds how a vulnerable American character, Eliot is in need of physical and emotional companionship.

Even though Eliot becomes a part of Mrs. Sen's everyday life by being a witness to her emotions, his mother, an American living in her home country, is unable to grasp the emotional agony that Mrs. Sen goes through. In contrast to his emotional bonding with Mrs. Sen, when Eliot recalls his memories with his mother, he can only think of the times when he was deprived of his mother's affection: "It was one of the rare days his mother had a day off, but they didn't go anywhere...Eliot had suggested that they go through the car wash a few miles down the road...but his mother said she was too tired" (Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's" 116). Therefore, while Mrs. Sen suffers from the trauma of being physically away from home, that is, her country of origin, Eliot is psychologically homeless as he lacks a close and emotionally stable relationship with his mother. From the very beginning of his babysitting days, Eliot is aware of Mrs. Sen's obsession with her home and her cultural habits. While chopping vegetables, Mrs. Sen usually refuses to let Eliot walk around, except for one occasion: "she broke her own rule; in need of additional supplies and reluctant to rise from the catastrophic mess that barricaded her, she asked Eliot to fetch something from the kitchen" (Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's" 115). I would claim that her willingness to allow an American boy to "invade" her kitchen, an area which symbolises an ongoing

composition of her home culture traces (Anderson, Second Edition 15), shows that she is rather open emotionally toward Eliot. However, the episode also makes it obvious that though Mrs. Sen is comfortable sharing her innermost feelings in the presence of Eliot, she ensures that his mother does not witness her daily activities: “By the time Eliot’s mother arrived at twenty past six, Mrs. Sen always made sure all evidences of her chopping was disposed of. The blade was scrubbed, rinsed, dried, folded, and stowed away in a cupboard with the aid of a stepladder” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 117). Mrs. Sen’s urgent act to dispose the evidences of her chopping reveals her inferiority complex and shame in front of the American woman. To Eliot, Mrs. Sen represents the “other,” and it is ironical that even though Mrs. Sen serves her ethnic food to his mother, she removes the traces of her cooking as if she were a powerless, marginalized figure compared to the dominant American woman.

To further highlight how home can be a site of human emotion and attachment, the two female characters in Lahiri’s short story need to be compared. I argue that Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother act as foils to each other. Mrs. Sen is a young Indian woman, who has moved from Calcutta to the US, following her husband. Though the narrator does not provide adequate details about Eliot’s mother so as to familiarise the readers with her practices and actions, her role and significance in the narrative is foregrounded mostly through Eliot. The striking contrast that instantly comes to the forefront is that Eliot’s mother is a financially independent, American woman. She is a single mother who has to work outside her home to support her son and herself, and, as I have discussed, she is emotionally detached from her son due to the lack of work-life balance in her life. On the other hand, Mrs. Sen is loving, affectionate and welcoming. In short, Mrs. Sen is everything that an eleven-year-old can desire and the exact opposite of his own mother. Hence, Eliot does not mind being at Mrs. Sen’s place during the afternoon. He becomes involved in Mrs. Sen’s life emotionally, and projects his own needs and expectations on her.

Unfortunately, the cultural exchange between Mrs. Sen and Eliot does not last long.⁷⁴ After the car accident, Eliot’s mother refuses to send her son to Mrs. Sen’s place and decides that he will rather stay alone at home during her office hours. Although Eliot’s

⁷⁴The relationship of the protagonist and the American boy has not only been limited to the domestic space, but they have also become close companions through their car journeys. As I have discussed earlier, during one of their trips to the fish market, Mrs. Sen causes a car accident in which both of them are injured.

mother calls him as soon as he gets home from school, she fails to understand that he still needs affection, love, and tenderness, and more importantly, her company, which Mrs Sen has provided.

The transformative nature of emotional experiences is also reflected by the colours associated with the physical places. In my reading, this association can be vaguely related to the trope of synaesthesia. In 1901 synaesthesia⁷⁵ (also spelled synesthesia) “began to be used in literary scholarship to refer to cross-sensory metaphors, and by the 1940s linguistics had extended its meaning to the relationship between speech sounds and the sensory experiences they are meant to represent” (Dann 11). As Kevin Dann points out, “color hearing is commonly designated by the generic word ‘synaesthesia’” (Dann 12).. When Eliot is at Mrs. Sen’s apartment, he is exposed to a vibrant atmosphere, evident from the bright colours reminiscent of India, the food she makes, the smell of her food, such as the combination of all the spices and the colour of her vermillion⁷⁶: “Mrs. Sen’s slippers, each a different color,” “pimpled yellow fat off chicken parts,” “crushed vermillion,” “bright pink yogurt” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 114-18). Contrary to these vibrant colours, which suggest a lively surrounding, at the end of the story Eliot is portrayed looking out to the “gray waves receding from the shore” (Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s” 135) in his family’s beach house, which reveals gloomy emotions such as homelessness, melancholy, and isolation. It is ironical that his mother has been looking for someone to take care of him in the beginning of the narrative, and in the end it is Eliot who longs for human contact and, perhaps, learns to take care of himself. It is also important to note that even though Mrs. Sen babysits Eliot, gradually it turns out that it is Eliot who looks after her. Each afternoon, Eliot has been a reliable companion to her. Mrs. Sen, who yearns to have a company, as most of the time she is alone at home, shares her innermost feelings and emotions with Eliot, making him part of her everyday life. Through the medium of her letters, recorded cassettes or stories about her homeland, Mrs. Sen metaphorically takes Eliot with her on her journey oscillating between both worlds, her homeland and the host nation. Based on my analysis of Lahiri’s short story, it can therefore

⁷⁵Synaesthesia is “an *involuntary* joining in which the real information of one sense is accompanied by a perception in another sense” (Dann 5, emphasis in the original). In neuroscience, this refers to a “rare trait” in which people report “extraordinary ‘phantom’ sensations such as colors or tastes, triggered by everyday activities such as reading or listening to music” (Jewanski et al. 259).

⁷⁶Vermillion in Bengali is known as *sindoor*. It is made by “using turmeric, mercury and lime which is red in color and in powder form” (Dahal 77). In Hindu cultural tradition, sindoor stands as a status symbol of married women, which also helps to “assist on controlling blood pressure, regulate and stimulate functions and activeness” (Dahal 77) of the women. During a wedding, groom puts sindoor on the forehead of his bride. It is never applied by unmarried women or widows.

be concluded that home is not simply a geographical place for these characters: emotions and attachments play a significant role in transforming this geographical location into a proper “home.” The short story suggests that citizens of the host country may become emotionally attached to the habits and practices of migrants, as these offer something neoliberal society lacks and badly needs: warmth and affection.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which displacement impacts South Asian diasporic women, both physically and emotionally. With the help of Brah’s notion of homing desire, I have defined “home” as both a geographical location characters can never actually return to and an imaginary space recreated in the West. Far away from their homeland, diasporic women yearn for the moments that they have spent with their loved ones. They suffer from alienation and nostalgia. Memories of their family members compel them to recreate a home-like atmosphere in the West. Relying on close reading, I have explored the various means, such as recorded cassettes, letters, clothes and food, through which female protagonists feel connected to their native customs and traditions.

Focusing on individual texts, my chapter has delved into the differences that characterize the attitude of the female characters towards their home cultures. For Ashima and Mrs. Sen the notion of home refers to Calcutta. They are unable to accept America as their new home. On the contrary, Nazneen feels somewhat privileged in London, moving away from her home country, which is evident mainly from the letters she exchanges with her sister, Hasina. By analysing the characters, I have explored the ways in which the recreation of home culture impacts the identity of the female protagonists. In contrast to Ashima, Nazneen and Jasmine, who find it less difficult to integrate into the host culture, Mrs. Sen, till the end of Lahiri’s narrative, does not seem to be comfortable in the United States. I have explored the role of music, clothes and food as means through which native cultural traditions are reproduced in the West. Based on the characters’ choice of clothes, music and food, I have shown the generational difference that exists between them. First-generation women, for instance, Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Nazneen and Mrs. Bhamra are obsessed with traditional food; they listen to music in their native language, and they prefer to wear their traditional clothes. On the contrary, second-generation characters, for example, Sahana, Jess, Moushumi and Sonia detest the native customs and traditions of their parents. They can more easily relate to the culture of the host nation, which is, in fact, the place of their birth, than to the customs

that their parents practice in the West. Despite these marked differences between the two generations of female characters, there are exceptions, which I have foregrounded in my chapter: for instance, in Mukherjee's novel, food represents a safe channel through which the protagonist, who experienced traumatic events, can relate to her cultural traditions. Rekha in Chadha's film is also an exceptional character: although she is from Mumbai, India, her style is more westernised than the fashion of the elderly women who have been residing in the UK for quite some time.

The final part of this chapter has dealt with the role emotion plays in how "home" is imagined. Focusing mainly on Lahiri's short story, I have argued that citizens of the host country may become emotionally attached to the cultural practices of the migrants, which offer love, warmth and affection, something which neoliberal society lacks and badly needs. Through the bonding of Mrs. Sen and Eliot, I have pointed out that despite the cultural and language differences, Eliot experiences more warmth at Mrs. Sen's place than at home with his mother. Both Eliot and Mrs. Sen experience alienation and melancholy: Mrs. Sen, being away from her family members and feeling left alone by her husband, feels as lonely as Eliot, who is left alone at his home by his busy mother. The chapter has shown that studying various aspects of homing desire contributes to mapping the ways in which South Asian women search for their places in the West. Though the conflict between "home" and "homelessness" does not get resolved by the end of the literary and the cinematic narratives, the act of performing native cultural traditions in the host culture fulfil their desire of creating a homelike place in the West.

CHAPTER 5

Trauma and Healing: The Journeys of Diasporic Women as an Escape Mechanism

1. Introduction

One of the primary reasons why South Asian people migrate to the West is the “American Dream,” which can be defined as a “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement...a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable” (Adams 404). Similar to America, which is a popular destination for the South Asian immigrants, Britain is also a dreamland for diasporic migrants. Nevertheless, it has to be foregrounded here that American and British societies are quite different in terms of class structure. In contrast to British society, which is rather rigid, class structure in America is more flexible, society is more open and hard work counts. Many scholars have claimed that the American Dream is a myth. For instance, Neil ten Kortenaar criticises Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* by claiming that the novel idealises “assimilation [as] thoroughly unrealistic in very problematic ways” (Kortenaar 379). He poses the question, “[w]hat makes it possible for Jasmine to become so thoroughly American?” (Kortenaar 379-80). Kortenaar further argues that in Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* “is the mouthpiece of an educated cosmopolitan writer who hides behind the mask of an uneducated, much victimized daughter of poverty” (Kortenaar 380). In my view, however, the victimisation of Jasmine and other diasporic characters has a more complex role in the narratives I explore than simply offering a safe mask for the writers to hide behind. As I argue in this chapter, apart from fulfilling their desire to live a better life in the US and the UK, diasporic immigrants such as Jasmine also move away from their homelands in order to escape from trauma. This trauma can be both individual and collective. Relying on Kai Erikson’s argument, I define individual trauma as a “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively” (Erikson 153), whereas collective trauma is “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson 154). Furthermore, collective trauma can also be intergenerational, as my analysis of Ali’s *Brick Lane* showcases. It is my contention that traumas have a significant role in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, which are the two novels I explore in this chapter. While I analyse individual trauma in both *Jasmine* and in

Brick Lane, I will show how Mukherjee's protagonist is traumatised by the political riot in Punjab, which is an example of collective trauma, while Ali's main character is haunted by intergenerational trauma inherited from her mother.

Written in the first person, Mukherjee's novel explores the journey of a young woman, Jasmine, who moves to the US to fulfil her dead husband's dream of moving to a Western country in order to gain access to better educational opportunities and to escape from the political turmoil in India. Though the protagonist speaks of immigration as a "matter of duty and honor" (Mukherjee 97), her husband, in fact, wanted her to move to America to have a "real life" (Mukherjee 81). It is not clearly mentioned in the novel what Prakash, Jasmine's husband, has meant by "real life". He is an engineer and is not satisfied with his job as a repairman in India, so probably he desired to have a meaningful and successful life in America, where he could have made the best use of his engineering skills. His frustration is evident when he explains how he feels about his job to Jasmine: "You see how the mediocre are smart enough to get away? Only we, the best ones, let ourselves be hemmed in by bloodsuckers and dunderheads" (Mukherjee 84). However, Prakash's dream of moving to the US and settling down there does not get fulfilled because of his untimely death. In contrast to the other female protagonists in the narratives I analyse, who move to the West primarily to accompany their husbands, Jasmine migrates to the US for socioeconomic reasons. Furthermore, and more importantly, she wants to leave due to the individual and collective trauma she has experienced in India: the loss of her husband and Sikh separatism, which led to armed conflicts between Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab.

In this chapter I explore how traumatised characters, such as Jasmine and Nazneen, cope with their traumatic experiences in the West. Cathy Caruth has famously defined trauma as an "unclaimed experience," which is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). My aim is to analyse trauma as such an unclaimed experience, which, due to its unassimilated nature, haunts the protagonists unconsciously. The journey from Jasmine's home country to the US, for instance, and her subsequent journeys within the host nation, reflect different stages of coping with trauma. My chapter will show that the protagonists, Jasmine and Nazneen, come to terms with their traumas to a certain extent. But it also needs to be foregrounded that the diasporic characters are further traumatised in the Western locations. Tracing Jasmine's journey from "city (Lahore, left by her father at Partition) to countryside (Hasnapur) to city (Jullundhar) to countryside (Florida) to city (New York) to

countryside (Iowa)” (Kortenaar 382), Kortenaar argues that the “geographical cycles correspond to a narrative pattern: the sequence of flight – confinement – escape – stability – flight is repeated over and over” (Kortenaar 382) in the novel. In my reading, the geographical locations that she traverses in the West do not simply represent Jasmine’s escape: they act both as sites where she experiences further traumatic events and grounds for her healing.

In the West the female characters help Jasmine cope with her traumatic experiences by offering her shelter and financial stability, which foster her healing since they listen to her stories and provide a sense of safety. These are Lillian Gordon, the first woman who helps her by giving her a place to stay after she migrates to America; Kate, Lillian’s daughter, who finds her a job as a caregiver; Wylie, Taylor’s wife, who appoints Jasmine to look after her daughter, Duff; Karin, Bud’s ex-wife, who at the end of the narrative encourages Jasmine to walk out with the man of her choice; and Mother Ripplemeyer, Bud’s mother, who helps her find a job at a bank in the US. Jasmine comes in contact with these women at different phases of her life and each of them has a significant impact on her: they not only help her to heal from her trauma but also encourage her to acquire a more empowered position in society. But it has to be foregrounded that although characters in the West extend their support especially through empathy and understanding, as I have argued in the subsection on solidarity in the third chapter, they also impose American norms on her, which is indicated by the different names, such as “Jase” and “Jazzy,” that these characters give to the protagonist. But before analysing the traumas the main character has experienced and her coping strategies, I would like to give a brief historical background of the political turmoil that resulted from the riot between the Hindus and the Sikhs in Hasnapur, as narrativised in the novel, and the role it has played in the emigration of the female protagonist. Though the riot, which is the collective trauma (albeit related to her individual trauma of the death of her husband), has begun in Hasnapur, India, it had a long-lasting impact on Jasmine’s life: the impact of the event is haunting her, similar to the loss of her husband, even when she is in the Western cities, far away from her homeland.

2. Sikh Separatism and Collective Trauma in *Jasmine*

The main character of *Jasmine* is Jyoti, a Hindu girl from the village of Hasnapur, Punjab⁷⁷, India, who is also the narrator of the novel. Similar to Nazneen, a village girl in *Brick Lane*, who is portrayed as the representation of purity, Jasmine is also a “very special case” (Mukherjee 135) as she is from a small village. In other words, she is also seen as an “uncorrupted,” “pure” girl from the village, which is an identity that Jasmine, similar to Nazneen, comes to reject. Jasmine falls in love with Prakash Vihh, a friend of her brother, and they eventually get married. In contrast to Karim in Ali’s narrative, who desires to possess the pure village girl whom he sees as authentic, however, Prakash wants to transform his wife, which is clearly expressed by his act of changing Jyoti’s name to Jasmine: “He wanted to break down the Jyoti I’d been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. He said, ‘You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You’ll quicken the whole world with your perfume’” (Mukherjee 77). However, both gestures are possessive and patriarchal, though in different ways. Prakash’s act of changing Jyoti’s name can be read as a manifestation of his patriarchal authority, based on the idea that he can make decisions for Jasmine on her behalf. Furthermore, his desire to “make [her] a new kind of city woman” (Mukherjee 77) suggests that he is trying to modernise Jasmine so that she can later fit in the Western society easily. However, it has to be foregrounded that Prakash is the only other person besides Masterji, her school teacher,⁷⁸ who encourages Jasmine to study. He also desires a more comfortable future for both of them. Being frustrated with his mediocre job as a repairman and the growing unemployment in India, he plans to gain admission to the Florida’s International Institute of Technology. He even contacts his one-time professor, Devinder Vadhera, in America, who promises to help him with the admission procedure. But his dreams remain unfulfilled: one day, when Prakash goes out shopping with Jasmine to buy her a new sari, he is attacked by Sukhinder (or Sukkhi), a member of the Sikh boys’ gang, the Khalsa⁷⁹ Lions.” Sukkhi places a bomb in a VCR, which instantly kills Prakash, but Jasmine survives the disaster. The death of Jasmine’s husband, then, which is her individual trauma, needs to be understood in the larger context of Sikh separatism: the collective trauma Mukherjee’s novel thematises.

⁷⁷Punjab is one of the smallest states located in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. This state is also known as “The Land of Five Rivers”. Though Punjabi is the official language of Punjab, Hindi is also widely spoken..

⁷⁸Masterji is the man who used to teach Jasmine in school. In India, the term “master” means teacher, and “ji” is used as an honorific suffix.

⁷⁹The Khalsa means “the Pure-Bodied and the Pure-Hearted,” (Mukherjee 65) referring to the Sikhs.

Jasmine explores Sikh separatism⁸⁰ and the Khalistan Movement⁸¹ in Punjab, which became dominant in the 1980s, the time when the novel is set. The root of the riot has been laid during the partition of India in 1947. The Sikhs wanted an independent state called Khalistan, which “spawned a militant wing that during the 1980s and 1990s involved thousands of individuals. The crackdown against insurgency by the Indian government was extreme; extrajudicial executions, ‘disappearances,’ custodial rapes, and ubiquitous torture

earned India the condemnation of every major international human rights organization” (Mahmood 528). During the same time, the Khalistan militants “moved beyond the international laws of armed conflict to commit atrocities against Punjabi civilians. Over the twenty years of conflict, tens of thousands of people...were killed, and Khalistan was not established” (Mahmood 528). Even though Hasnapur, the setting of Mukherjee’s narrative, had a Hindu majority, Hindu families, for instance, Jasmine’s and Prakash’s, among others, lived in fear because of the Sikhs⁸². In 1920, the Sikhs established the Akali Dal to promote the Sikh community. Subsequently the Akali party failed⁸³ to “capitalise on its advantage of being the sole and effective champion of the Sikhs” (Jetly 63). Although several military operations such as Operation Woodrose (1986-1987) and Operation Black Thunder (1988)

⁸⁰Sikh separatism is the “worst violence erupted in Punjab, where, ironically, the majority of the Sikh population had gained affluence in the wake of India’s Green Revolution of the late 1960s. Yet bumper crops and higher per capita incomes brought all the gadgets and toys of modernity, which pulled or lured many younger Sikhs away from ingrained tradition and religious values that others considered sacred. This opened large gaps within Sikh society, almost as wide and deep as those that separated Punjab from the rest of India...By the early 1980s some Sikhs were calling for more than mere separate provincial statehood, instead demanding nothing less than a nation-state of their own, an autonomous Sikh Khalistan, or “land of the Pure” (“Sikh separatism”).

⁸¹The Khalistan Movement is the “movement by Sikh leaders for a separate homeland and autonomy started to create serious problems when some rebellious Sikh elements started killings of gazetted officials, civil servants, and Hindu and Sikh citizens. The year 1984 became a turning point in the conflict and in June of that year the Indian Army hit the Sikh’s holiest place of worship, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, which had been converted into an armed camp by Sikh followers...In these attacks thousands of civilians were killed [and] most of them were Sikhs. This operation outraged the whole of Sikh community at large and the demand for an independent state of Khalistan caught boom” (Chawla 85).

⁸²Darshan S. Tatla argues that Mukherjee’s portrayal of Sikhism and Sikh characters leads to a negative image of the community (Tatla 1). According to him, as an upper-class Bengali Brahmin, Mukherjee’s American neo-nationalist ideology changing migrants’ exclusivity is evident from an Indian context and background (Tatla 2). He further points out that “Mukherjee’s American ‘neo-nationalism,’ her condemnation of ‘cultural baggage’ of immigrants, and their ‘exclusive reproduction in the first world’ . . . arises partially from her understanding of the old world, and of India’s multiethnic experiment in particular, where several minorities have graduated from seeking ‘special position’ to ‘nationalist struggles’ threatening its fragile unity” (Tatla 2).

⁸³The dilemma for the Akali party was that despite being a strong advocate of the Sikh culture and religion, it never enjoyed full support of the Sikhs (Jetly 63). Sikhs had proven their loyalty to the British in the early years of “British Rule in Punjab,” particularly as “members of the British Indian army” (Jetly 62). “Their anger deepened as instead of the much-promised 33 percent representation that they expected as reward for their army services, they were given under the Government of India Act 1919, only 15 percent of a total of 93 seats in the Punjab’s legislative council” (Jetly 62).

were set up to control the growing violence, the force only aggravated the situation (Jetly 69). Nevertheless, the movement for the formation of an independent Sikh state found support from the Sikh diaspora. Extremist organisations such as the “National Council of Khalistan, Babbar Khalsa International and Dal Khalsa flourished in different parts of the world, particularly in the US, Canada, Italy, Denmark, Holland, and the United Kingdom” (Jetly 69). In New York City, Mukherjee’s protagonist, Jasmine, meets Sukkhi, the member of the Khalistan group and murderer of her husband, and she is forced to run away to Iowa after the encounter.

Set in the 1980s, Mukherjee’s narrative not only highlights the political turmoil in India, which is a result of the armed conflicts between the Hindus and the Sikhs, but it also traces the aftereffects of the riot by depicting the “collective psychological health” (Alexander 7) of the characters. Exploring the notion of cultural trauma, Jeffrey Alexander points out that “[c]ultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1). A similar traumatic event is narrativised in *Jasmine*: the “horrendous event” (Alexander 7) of armed conflicts “leaves [an] indelible” (Alexander 7) mark on both Prakash and Jasmine. As a result, the couple decides to move away from India. But due to his sudden death, Jasmine travels to the US all by herself. She even plans to give him a proper funeral near Florida university campus. I read her act of moving away from the home country as an attempt to resolve, or, at least to come to terms with her trauma, since, as Alexander argues, “[t]rauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self” (Alexander 5). Jasmine leaves India precisely for this reason: apart from the loss of her husband, she migrates due to the political turmoil in her home country. As I argue in the next section, her journey both to the US and within the country reflects how she is trying to resolve the experience of these traumatic events.

3. The Impact of Traumatic Memory on Female Identity

Despite her emigration from Punjab, Jasmine is unable to get over her traumatic past easily. She oscillates between a “*crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*” (Caruth 7) [italics in the original]. In other words, she suffers from the “unbearable nature of an event” (Caruth 7), which is, in her case, the murder of her beloved husband, and the larger context of this trauma, which is collective. It is because of these traumatic experiences that she is forced to leave her homeland and search for a new place and identity for herself: “I was spiraling

into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness” (Mukherjee 148). The collective trauma the narrative engages with, that is, the armed conflicts that result from Sikh separatism, is hardly known in the West. Therefore, in line with Alexander’s argument that “[i]t would be a serious misunderstanding if trauma theory [were] restricted in its reference to Western social life” (Alexander 24),⁸⁴ the novel sheds light on peripheralised historical events and explores their impact on the individual psyche. This way, *Jasmine* does not simply introduce hardly known historical events to Western readers, but also contributes to non-Western conceptualisations of trauma.

Throughout the narrative, Jasmine takes up multiple names, which symbolise the protagonist’s different “shapes” and “selves” (Mukherjee 215). For each identity that she acquires, she has a different man in her life: “Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half-Face for Kali” (Mukherjee 197). However, Jasmine does not stick to one name and constantly sheds these identities in the novel. I would claim that this is a survival strategy of the protagonist to cope with her trauma: “We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams” (Mukherjee 29). Jasmine not only wants to discard her different names, but she also wants to forget her past experience, else “it will kill” (Mukherjee 33) her. “Too much attachment” to her past memories will result in “too much disillusion” (Mukherjee 200), she asserts. Furthermore, it can also be argued that Jasmine, similar to Nazneen, escapes from patriarchal oppression as she chooses to move from one place to another. The act of movement further echoes Freud’s claim that even though the traumatic incident forces one to leave the home country, it also frees the person from the fear (Caruth 23), which is based on his own experience of fleeing Vienna during Nazism. Jasmine’s displacement, then, can be read as a coping strategy to deal with her traumatic experiences. In this chapter, I focus on Jasmine’s journey to the West and within the the United States, aiming to explore how she gradually comes to terms with her traumatic memories. Unlike other female protagonists, such as Ashima and Mrs. Sen, who long for the

⁸⁴Alexander, similar to Stef Craps, points out that Caruth’s trauma theory is Westocentric. He claims that “it has been Western societies that have recently provided the most dramatic apologies for traumatic episodes in their national histories. [...] it has been the non-Western regions of the world, and the most defenseless segments of the world’s population, that have recently been subjected to the most terrifying traumatic injuries” (Alexander 24). According to Craps, Caruth “[marginalises] or [ignores] traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures” (Craps 2). She provides a universal definition of trauma and in her work, she disregards the “connections between metropolitan and non-Western traumas” (Craps 2).

“good old days”⁸⁵ (Dragojlovic 92) in their home country, Jasmine constantly struggles to forget her traumatic past, and, therefore, she distances herself from Indian cultural habits.

However, for Mukherjee’s main character, trauma provides “the very link between cultures” (Craps 2). The cultural linkage based on trauma is evident in the relationship between Jasmine and Lillian Gordon. Soon after her sexual assault in America, Lillian is the first person to take care of Jasmine. She provides her shelter and medical help. Similar to Jasmine, Lillian, too, distances herself from her past memories: she forbids all discussion of past events. She has a “low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia” (Mukherjee 131). This can also be read as Lillian’s survival strategy. Highlighting individual’s response to trauma, Alexander points out that “[w]hen bad things happen to good people...they can become so frightened that they can actually repress the experience of trauma itself” (Alexander 5). Although it is not mentioned in the narrative what Lillian has experienced, yet the readers can comprehend that by not remembering her past events she is likely to be repressing a traumatic experience. Furthermore, the protagonist is empathic towards Du, the adopted son of Jasmine and Bud, who also suffers from past traumas. As I have argued in the third chapter, however, the solidarity that exists between the characters in Mukherjee’s novel seems to be rather idealistic. It is mostly their willingness to help that makes characters ready to listen to each other, but they often fail to connect on a deeper level since they find it difficult to imagine Jasmine’s life outside America. Mukherjee’s narrative, then, does not only engage with a non-Western collective trauma and its impact on the individual, but also showcases the ways in which characters of different cultural backgrounds strive towards empathic connectedness and cross-cultural solidarity.

Besides focusing on non-Western or minority trauma in this chapter, I will also discuss intergenerational trauma in the diasporic context. Exploring the transmission of traumas, Angela Connolly points out that “the concept of intergenerational trauma was first used to describe the traumatic experiences transmitted by Holocaust survivors to their children, then it was applied to the traumas transmitted in repressive regimes” (Connolly 610). Connolly further argues that “the presence of intergenerational trauma [is] not only in the children of Holocaust survivors but also in the children of repressive regimes” (Connolly 610). In most cases, the individuals repress the memories of their traumatic past, which later seem to haunt

⁸⁵Ana Dragojlovic uses the term “tempo doeloe” to refer to the longing for the “good old days” (Dragojlovic 92) in the diasporic context.

them. Ana Dragojlovic uses the term “intergenerational haunting”⁸⁶ (Dragojlovic 93) to highlight the negative impact of past events previous generations have experienced, which are passed on to the next generations unconsciously. The traumatic emotions are latently present in the unconscious of the subsequent generations: as Dragojlovic argues, the “unconscious” acts as a “crypt” for these generations, which is a space from where ancestral secrets are passed down” (Dragojlovic 95) to them. Instances of intergenerational trauma are evident in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*. Both Nazneen and her sister are affected by their mother’s tragic suicide, because the loss of their mother, Rupban, is “not only an individual childhood trauma. [Her] death has a social and cultural dimension which Nazneen and her sister, Hasina, inherit, as they were to adopt the life their mother had” (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 180). However, Ali’s novel does not shed much light on Rupban. It is from the exchange of letters between the sisters that the readers are informed about Rupban’s oppressions and how she ended her life:⁸⁷

Amma always say we are women what can we do? If she here now I know what she say I know it too well. But I am not like her. Waiting around. Suffering around. She wrong. So many ways. At the end only she act. She who think all path is closed for her. She take the only one forbidden. Forgive me sister I must tell you now this secret so long held inside me...Amma go past kitchen. No one is there. She go into store room...She take spear and test on the finger. She take another and put it back. And third one she take before is happy. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 434-35)

The above episode portrays how insignificant women’s lives are especially in the rural parts of Bangladesh: as Györke points out, “Rupban’s death is presented as an accident,⁸⁸ which sounds improbable; the only thing that is clear is that Nazneen, and especially Hasina, who turns out to be a witness of this event later in the novel, . . . are escaping from this fate, at the heart of which is the feeling that women’s lives have no significance and their death have no

⁸⁶Dragojlovic argues that “[haunting] always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present Haunting is precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble...But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing something-to-be-done” (Dragojlovic 96).

⁸⁷There is a difference between the representation of Rupban’s suicide in the novel and in the film: in Ali’s novel, the protagonist’s mother commits suicide by piercing herself with a spear, but, in the film (dir. Sarah Gavron), she drowns herself.

⁸⁸Mumtaz, Nazneen’s aunt, found Rupban, “leaning low over the sacks of rice in the store hut, staked through the heart by a spear. ‘She had fallen,’ said Mumtaz, ‘and the spear was the only thing holding her up. It looked...It looked as if she was still falling.’” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 46).

consequence” (Györke, “From Transnational to Translocal” 180). Even though Nazneen emigrates to London, the traumatic memories of her mother haunt her. In the beginning of the novel, she is not aware of her emotional agony regarding her mother’s oppression, but gradually, it becomes an “active part of [her] present” (Dragojlovic 104) life in the West. She imagines the presence of her mother in her Brick Lane apartment: “Nazneen dreamed of Gouripur. She sat cross-legged on a choki and Amma sat behind her and plaited her hair...’ What shall I do now, Amma? Amma?’ Nazneen turned around. There was no one there” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 430-31). This is an example that reveals how the loss of her mother still haunts Nazneen in London. Hence, Nazneen’s unconscious keeps the traces of her mother’s tragic experiences even when she is away from her homeland.

4. On the Move: Jasmine’s Traumatic Experiences and the Reintegration of Repressed Emotions

Mukherjee’s narrative explores the instability of the protagonist. Focusing on the “mechanisms of psychological defense between the external shattering event and the actor’s internal response” (Alexander 5), Jeffrey Alexander argues that “[r]ather than activating direct cognition and rational understanding, the traumatizing event becomes distorted in the actor’s imagination and memory” (Alexander 5). Relying on Alexander’s concept of trauma, I argue that in order to escape from the “external shattering event” (Alexander 5) of armed conflicts due to Sikh separatism, Jasmine is constantly on the move. Not only the cultural trauma but also the loss of her husband “becomes distorted” (Alexander 5) in her memory. Furthermore, because of her continuous displacement, Jasmine is similar to Bhabha’s vernacular cosmopolitan⁸⁹ as she moves “in-between cultural traditions” and reveals “hybrid forms of life” (Bhabha xiii). In contrast to James Clifford’s argument that cosmopolitans are “necessarily elite” (Clifford, “Traveling Cultures” 106-07), Jasmine belongs to the lower financial strata of the society. Thus, she can be read as a vernacular cosmopolitan, who is, by definition, outside this elite group. For instance, Jasmine is a “professional, like a school teacher or a nurse” (Mukherjee 175). Though the narrative does not provide information about her financial status, it is clear that she has low-paid jobs in the United States. But despite her social status and her detestation⁹⁰ of American culture, she identifies herself more with the culture of the host nation compared to the other female characters in my selected

⁸⁹I have explained the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism in the first chapter of my dissertation. See page 22.

⁹⁰Jasmine finds American culture “humiliating” and “disappointing” (Mukherjee 29): “I wish I’d known America before it got perverted” (Mukherjee 201).

works, for example, Mrs. Sen and Mrs. Bhamra. I would argue that this is due to that fact that Jasmine escapes from her homeland and the traumatic events experienced there. This is the very reason why she rather identifies with American cultural norms than with the traditions of her home country.

Even though Mukherjee's heroine thinks she has travelled "the world without ever leaving the familiar crops of Punjab" (Mukherjee 128), in reality she understands that her "home" is no longer in India. Jasmine represses memories of Punjab due to her trauma: "we're both a long way from home, aren't we? What'll we do?...There's no going back, is there?" (Mukherjee 164). This echoes Brah's notion that home is a "mythical" place for the diasporic immigrants where they wish to return but, in fact, can never do so (Brah 188). It is also to be foregrounded that there lies a contradiction in the protagonist's character. On the one hand, Jasmine relinquishes the cultural traditions of her home country; she distances herself from the "artificially maintained Indianness" (Mukherjee 145) at the Professor's residence, and everything related to her past life in her homeland. But on the other hand, she depends on her traditional dishes,⁹¹ which help her challenge American people's view of what good food is like. One explanation that can be provided for this detachment is the trauma that she has encountered and the "ongoing experience of having survived it" (Caruth 7). Since her birth, Jasmine has endured several traumatic experiences. As she recalls, born as a girl-child she was not wanted by her parents and they decided to kill her: "When the midwife carried me out, my sisters tell me, I had a ruby-red choker of bruise around my throat and sapphire fingerprints on my collarbone...My mother was a sniper. She wanted to spare me the pain of a dowryless bride...I survived the sniping" (Mukherjee 40). Later she witnessed the assassination of her husband. Therefore, her strong detestation of her home culture can be read as an "outer manifestation of childhood trauma" (Bhattacharya 73). Her detachment from anything related to Indian culture and everything related to her past shows that she is in denial, not willing to face her past and her traumatic experiences.

Although Jasmine has primarily been traumatised in India, she experiences further traumatic events in the United States. This shows that America is not presented as an ideal country in the novel: Jasmine is both assisted in coping with her past and further traumatised there. The very first night in America is no less than a nightmare for her. The captain of the

⁹¹I have discussed this in the fourth chapter, in the subsection on the impact of culinary art on female identity. See page 112.

ship, Half Face,⁹² who has accompanied Jasmine to Florida, rapes her in a motel room. After the “hideous crime” (Mukherjee 117), she murders her rapist:

I began to shiver. The blade need not be long, only sharp, and my hand not strong, only quick. His eyes fluttered open even before I felt the metal touch his throat, and his smile and panic were nearly instantaneous. I wanted that moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out. I wanted him to open his mouth and start to reach, I wanted that extra hundredth of a second when the blade bit deeper than any insect, when I jumped back as he jerked forward, slapping at his neck while blood, ribbons of bright blood, rushed between his fingers. (Mukherjee 118)

In my reading, the above episode exposes the symptoms of the protagonist’s repressed traumas: she experienced misogyny in India and witnessed the brutal killing of her husband, which is followed by sexual assault in the United States. These experiences are so severe that they push her to murder her molester. In the second chapter of my dissertation, I have read this episode as an example of empowerment. The protagonist’s act of murder shows that she is able to defend herself, and similar to the goddess Kali, who slays demons to restore the order of the world, Jasmine murders her rapist to protest against the idea that women should suffer in silence. For her, Half-Face symbolically represents an extended version of her traumas and she does not regret her act of killing him: “Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful” (Mukherjee 171). Thus, the harshness of her act shows that she is becoming a fighter in the novel.

During Jasmine’s journey, she meets several people, both male and female, who help her cope with her traumatic past to a certain extent. The first friend and guide in Jasmine’s life is her husband, Prakash Vijh. He is clearly an open-minded person compared to other men in the village. He wants to be called by his first name, in contrast to the stereotypical belief in Indian households that women should not call their husbands by their first names. Prakash is against the idea of Jasmine getting pregnant at a young age, he rather encourages her to continue her studies. In India, Prakash helps her come to terms with the violent riot by

⁹²Half-Face is the captain of the ship called *The Gulf Shuttle*, the ship which the protagonist boarded from at the Gulf Coast of Florida. Half-face “had lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam...Half-face was famous in the west Caribbean. Half-Face was a demolitions expert before he became a sea captain” (Mukherjee 104-05).

encouraging her to read and write. Even though the protagonist experiences further traumatic events in the West, she also undergoes the process of healing, especially through “cross-cultural solidarity” (Craps 2). Lillian Gordon is the first woman in America who rescues Jasmine when she is lying semi-conscious on the highway after escaping from the motel room. By providing her a residence, Lillian not only rescues Jasmine physically, but her home symbolises a safe place for the protagonist; as she asserts: “I didn’t tell Mrs. Gordon what she’d rescued me from” (Mukherjee 131). Lillian calls her “Jazzy” and introduces her to American culture (Mukherjee 133). She even allows Jasmine to borrow her daughter’s clothes, which suggests that she supports, perhaps even loves Jasmine. Despite the helpful attitude of the American woman, however, renaming the protagonist shows that Lillian is imposing the norms of her own culture on Jasmine, suggesting that cross-cultural solidarity is rather an idealistic aim than a reality in this novel.

From Lillian’s place, Jasmine goes to stay with Professor Ji, Prakash’s teacher. Though she has a suffocating experience at the Professor’s house because of the artificial Indianness in the apartment, the family treats her well. Thereafter, Jasmine contacts Kate, the daughter of Lillian Gordon, who helps her find a job as a professional caregiver for Taylor and Wylie’s daughter, Duff. Taylor calls her Jase, and they fall for each other. Taylor’s act of renaming suggests that he too, similar to Lillian, is trying to impose American cultural norms on Jasmine as a result of the unequal power relations between them. Nevertheless, this is Jasmine’s first affair after the death of her husband, which helps her feel reborn: “Jyoti [is] now a *sati*- goddess; she [has] burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida” (Mukherjee 176, italics in the original). Similar to Tilo’s rebirth at the end of Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*, Jasmine burns her old self, Jyoti, and engages in a love affair with Taylor, which may be seen as part of her healing process, as she is overcoming the loss of her husband. But the relationship does not last long, as Jasmine, after seeing Sukhinder, her husband’s murderer in New York City, rushes to Baden in Iowa. In Iowa, she stays with Bud who calls her “Jane”. Even though Jasmine gets pregnant with his child, she adopts a son, Du, a Vietnamese orphan. Being a child with a “past as troubled and erratic as Jasmine’s” (Roberts 91), Du symbolises the new life emerging from the “east-west encounter” (Ganaie 180). Jasmine mourns when Du departs to live with his biological sister: “Blood is thick, I think. Du, my adopted son, is a mystery, but the prospect of losing him is like a miscarriage. I had relied on him, my silent ally against the bright lights, the rounded, genial landscape of Iowa” (Mukherjee 221). Jasmine “views his adoption into their mid-

Western home as she does her own: as a tenuous rebirth of self' (Roberts 91). Apart from Bud and Du, Bud's mother, Mother Ripplemeyer, also helps her by finding her a job at bank. Towards the end of the narrative, Bud's ex-wife, Karin, encourages Jasmine to leave Bud and to move in with Taylor, the man of her love. These instances show that characters do their best to assist Jasmine in their own ways, yet genuine cross-cultural solidarity often fails in the novel due to the fact that they impose their own cultural norms on Jasmine by giving her different names.

Jasmine's journeys hint at how she is coming to terms with her traumatic past. Mukherjee's novel opens with an astrologer's prediction of her "widowhood and exile" (Mukherjee 3): "What is to happen will happen" (Mukherjee 3). But by the end, the female protagonist challenges the prophecy: "Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove" (Mukherjee 240). Jasmine has the power to change her fate in Mukherjee's novel. Although it is not always clear whether she is indeed successful in overcoming her traumatic past or if she is simply deceiving herself by repressing her emotions as survivors of trauma tend to do, she becomes a "fighter and adapter" (Mukherjee 40) in the novel. The narrative also shows that Jasmine is able to reintegrate her repressed emotions, which points towards her healing. She no longer feels the burden of her past, for instance, at the end of the novel the protagonist asserts: "It isn't guilt that I feel, it's relief" (Mukherjee 240). In contrast to the protagonist's situation in India, where she has been forced to listen to her father and her two brothers, her journey to the US, despite the suffering and the difficulties, proves to be fruitful as it leads to the formation of an individual self who no longer lives at the mercy of others. The novel ends on a positive note: "there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway...greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (Mukherjee 241). I would claim that by the end, Jasmine comes to terms with her traumatic past. She may not be able to get over her emotional anguish entirely, but she is definitely healing as she no longer seems to be in denial but portrays herself as a woman who has "seen the worst and survived. Like creatures in fairy tales, [she has] shrunk and [she has] swollen and [she has] swallowed the cosmos whole" (Mukherjee 240). The narrative suggests that her repressed emotions are becoming integrated: "I...cry through all the lives I've given birth to, cry for all the dead" (Mukherjee 241). This crying suggests that she is releasing emotions that were repressed earlier.

Narrating her story is the main experience that helps Jasmine overcome her traumatic past. Since Mukherjee's novel is retrospective, Jasmine remembers and narrates her past when she is twenty-four, which shows how she frames her story. This is how she comments on the astrologer's prediction, for instance: "That stench stays with me. I'm twenty-four now, I live in Baden, Elsa County, Iowa, but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it. I know what I don't want to become" (Mukherjee 5). Although she receives love and support from the people in America, it is Jasmine's own efforts that enable her to reintegrate her repressed traumatic emotions, which she does through finding a narrative frame for her unacknowledged experiences.

5. The Representation of Trauma in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Similar to Bharati Mukherjee's novel, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* also highlights instances of trauma in the protagonist's home country as well as in the host nation. Though Nazneen is not the direct victim of violence, like Jasmine, both her mother's and her sister's fate suggest that abuse and patriarchal oppression would have been her lot had she stayed in Bangladesh. Through the exchange of letters between the sisters, the readers can see how Hasina, despite the fact that she is a strong woman, becomes a victim of sexual assaults: "Sometime when people see a beautiful thing they want to destroy it. The thing make them feel ugly so they act ugly" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 165). In contrast to Nazneen, who has married the man of her father's choice, has moved to London, and has mostly devoted herself to becoming a faithful wife and a caring mother, Hasina, at the tender age of sixteen, elopes with the man she loves. She also becomes financially independent, working in a garment factory in Dhaka. Although she is trying to avoid her mother's fate, there seems to be no viable option for her: "I thinking my life cursed. God have given me life but he has curse it" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 166). In comparison to Hasina's traumatic experiences, which are evident from the detailed information in the letters, the narrative does not shed much light on the tragic life⁹³ of Nazneen's mother, Rupban. It is suggested in the novel that she has committed suicide when she could no longer take the ill-treatment that has been inflicted upon her by the patriarchal society: "'God tests us,' she said. 'Don't you know this life is a test? Some He tests with riches and good fortune...or with jinn who come in the shape of men – or of husbands'" (Ali, *Brick Lane* 322). However, as the narrative does not reveal much about

⁹³I have discussed about Rupban's suicide and how it affects the protagonist's psyche in the subsection on intergenerational trauma in this chapter. See page 133.

these traumas, the readers need to guess what is happening with Hasina and what causes Rupban's death.

Gaps are also evident in the narrative of Nazneen's traumatic experiences. Although the novel represents the struggle related to her birth and how the midwife, similar to Jasmine's parents, wanted to strangle her at birth (Ali, *Brick Lane* 13), and it is not disclosed how baby Nazneen survives without any medical help. Furthermore, she also becomes the victim of patriarchal oppression as she is forced to marry Chanu, who is much older than her, and was chosen by her father. Her emigration is left out from the narrative as well: the first chapter of Ali's novel, which is set in East Pakistan, describes her birth and childhood, and in the next, she is already in London. It is not clear how her first child, Raqib, dies either. The readers need to read between the lines to understand the tragic event:

Open your eyes. Ruku! Ruku! What's wrong with him? Raqib! What's happened? Why does he not wake? Why doesn't he wake? The city shattered. Everything was in pieces. She knew it straight away, glimpsed it from the painful-white insides of the ambulance. Frantic neon signs. Headlights chasing the dark. An office block, cracked with light. These shards of the broken city. At the hospital she felt the panic...She ran with her son, carried him down long corridors while the walls fled before them. And then they took him out of her hands. (Ali, *Brick Lane* 116-17)

Hence, the silences and gaps play a significant role in *Brick Lane*, which suggest that the narrative represses the unsayable. This is a common sign of traumatic experiences. Focusing on the "traumatic paradox" (Amir 6) and the "inability to know it" (Amir 7), Dana Amir argues that "[t]rauma is not only an experience, but also the failure to experience that experience; not merely the threat itself, but the fact that the threat was recognized as such only a moment too late" (Amir 7). In other words, as traumatic events occur, the victim becomes "detached" (Amir 6) from the experiences, which remain "powerful but frozen, untransformable by either circumstantial processes or the passing of time" (Amir 7). This "traumatic paradox" (Amir 6) is evident in Ali's narrative. The protagonist, when she moves from her home country, is not fully aware of her trauma, but later, she experiences emotional anxiety in London, which reveal that she is suffering from an unresolved traumatic experience. For instance, Nazneen, after imagining her mother's presence in her kitchen, faints "on the kitchen floor, vomit dried on the corners of her mouth, eyes open and

unseeing” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 324). This episode clearly shows that the memories of her traumatic past still cause her emotional pain in London. Rupban’s suicide has a significant impact on Nazneen, and probably this is one of the reasons why she refuses to return to Bangladesh with Chanu. In one episode, Nazneen hears her mother speak in her Brick Lane apartment: “Amma squatted on her haunches in the corner...When you were a little girl, you used to ask me, ‘Amma why do you cry? My baby, do you know now?’...‘This is what women have to bear. Once, when you were a little girl, you could hardly wait to find out’” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 322). Relying on Dragojlovic’s notion of “intergenerational hauntings” (Dragojlovic 93), I would claim that Nazneen’s trauma is intergenerational: it is not only the loss of her mother that pains her, but also “what women have to bear” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 322), the very reason of her mother’s suicide, which is transmitted from generation to generation in repressive, patriarchal societies. Throughout her life, Nazneen is exposed to patriarchal violence. This “continuous exposure” (Craps 30) causes her to “develop feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and self-hatred” (Craps 30). Furthermore, the feelings that “[w]e are just women. What can we do?” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 103) and “[w]e will suffer in silence” (Ali, *Brick Lane* 302) also reveal that Nazneen’s trauma is not simply an individual experience: it has intergeneration aspects that point beyond her individual suffering. These patriarchal ideologies are so ingrained in her that she encounters repetitive nightmares and suffers from depression and anxiety. Thus, even with passing time she retains the memories of how her mother endured oppression and her own emotional pain partly stems from these memories.

Thus Ali, similar to Mukherjee, explores the impact of trauma on diasporic female character. Both writers engage with non-Western conceptualisations of trauma and the ways in which these haunt the protagonists when they are in the West. Both Jasmine and Nazneen suffer from individual traumas. However, Jasmine has also been traumatised by the armed conflicts due to Sikh separatism, which is an example of collective trauma, while Nazneen is affected by an intergenerational trauma inherited from her mother. For both protagonists, “memories of trauma are not only rigid and concrete – but unmentalized” (Amir 7). In other words, these traumatic experiences are not, and cannot, be represented in the narrative “properly.” Nevertheless, it is significant how trauma is narrativised in the novels. This is because the narrativisation of trauma is part of the healing process: transforming the unspeakable events into coherent narratives already indicates that the traumatised individual is coping with the event successfully. In Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, which is a first-person narrative, the protagonist herself narrativises the traumatic experiences she has gone through,

though her trauma is not accessible until the very end of the narrative, when her repressed emotions come to the surface. In contrast to *Jasmine*, *Brick Lane* is a third person narrative. In Ali's novel, the readers do not get access to Nazneen's consciousness at all, nor do they have proper information about Rupban's or Hasina's traumatic experiences. Therefore, the letters between the sisters and the gaps and silences in the narrative become important elements which hint at the tragic events that are experienced by the female characters.

6. Conclusion

My chapter has analysed the traumatic experiences portrayed in *Jasmine* and in *Brick Lane*. I have explored different forms of trauma: collective trauma, such as the riot between the Hindus and the Sikhs in *Jasmine*; individual trauma, for instance, the loss of the protagonist's husband in Mukherjee's novel and the death of Nazneen's mother, and intergenerational trauma, which is transmitted to Nazneen as a result of patriarchal oppression. Relying on the theory of Caruth, I have analysed how unacknowledged traumatic events haunt the protagonists when they are away from their home countries. Alexander's theory has helped me distinguish between individual trauma and collective trauma. Theories of Alexander and Craps have enabled me to foreground the fact that these novels engage with non-Western experiences of trauma. Finally, to analyse the intergenerational trauma I have relied on the theories of Dragojlovic and Connolly.

In this chapter, I have not only explored the traumatic experiences of the diasporic female characters, but I have also probed into how these characters come to terms with their traumas. The journeys that Jasmine undertakes are not only symptoms of the traumatic events in her home country and in the host nation, rather, these journeys point towards her healing. For instance, even though Jasmine is a victim of sexual assault in America on the very first day of her arrival, by the end of the novel, she is able to reintegrate her repressed emotions. Although some of the people in America help her with love and financial support, they also impose Western norms on the protagonist by renaming her. Therefore, cross-cultural solidarity, though presented as an ideal in this novel, often fails, and it is the narrativisation of her own traumatic experiences that help Jasmine heal.

Similar to the traumatic experiences of Mukherjee's protagonist, I have also analysed how Nazneen becomes a victim of trauma. Since her birth Nazneen have struggled, for instance, with the complications during her birth; the need to marry according to her father's choice, and later, in London, the loss of her first-born child. My chapter has also explored the

traumatic experiences of Nazneen's mother and her sister. While Rupban suffers from patriarchal oppression, Hasina is a victim of both patriarchal as well as sexual violence. With the help of specific examples from the text I have shown that in Ali's novel traumatic events are hardly ever mentioned, and the reader needs to read between the lines. For example, Hasina writes about their mother's suicide, which was earlier presented as an accident, in a letter to Nazneen. I have also probed into how trauma is narrativised in the two novels and have shown that Mukherjee's novel, which is a first-person narrative, is able to reveal more about the protagonists' healing than Ali's third person narrative, in which gaps and silences hint at the emotional agony of the characters.

CONCLUSION (and beyond)

My dissertation has traced the representations of the journeys of South Asian diasporic immigrants from their home countries, especially from India and Bangladesh, to Western metropolises. The primary aim of my research has been to explore the ways in which cultural displacement, identity formation and female empowerment are interconnected in a selection of contemporary South Asian diasporic novels and films, and I have also investigated the significance of trauma in two diasporic narratives. Different genres of fiction and film have been analysed: though most of the narratives studied offer realistic portrayals of social issues, a magical realist novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, and filmic parodies of Bollywood cinema have also been included. The analyses of the works of South Asian female writers and film directors, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*, and her short story, "Mrs. Sen's," Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* and *Bhaji on the Beach*, suggest that women mostly migrate to the West to accompany their husbands and escape from patriarchal oppression as well as traumatic events at their home countries. The forced migration of women often results in alienation, identity crisis and the loss of belonging.

The narratives I have explored depict four main attitudes towards the host country, which sometimes may overlap: female characters either attempt to find a balance between their cultural traditions and Western customs, thus becoming integrated into the metropolises, as Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* and Ashima in *The Namesake*; refuse to integrate into the culture of the host country, as Mrs Sen does; leave their traditions behind due to traumatic experiences, as Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel; or adopt a more playful and subversive attitude towards both cultures as we can see in Chadha's films. My dissertation has explored five key aspects of female empowerment: participation in the Western neoliberal market economy; appropriation of the Western locations; practising solidarity despite intersectional differences; recreating native cultural traditions in the West; and overcoming traumatic experiences.

The theoretical framework of my dissertation is based on cultural geography and urban studies, primarily the writings of Jon Anderson, Michel de Certeau, and Doreen Massey; theories of neoliberalism, as it is explored by David Harvey, Jamie Peck and Mitchum Huehls; theories of identity and intersectionality in the context of diaspora studies, based on the works of Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah and Kimberle Crenshaw; postcolonial criticism, theories of hybridity, mimicry and cosmopolitanism as explored by Homi Bhabha; food studies based

on the writings of Jopi Nyman and Anita Mannur; and trauma theory on the basis of Cathy Caruth's, Stef Craps' and Jeffrey Alexander's works. The theories of Anderson and Massey have helped me analyse the correlation between geographical locations and identity formation. Relying on their works, I have shown that the urban places in the UK and the US become sites where the intersection of culture occurs, which means that these places are not fixed, rather, they are flexible and impregnated with cultural meanings. Within these locations, which act as breeding grounds of new identities, the female characters encounter the traditions of the host nation, yet they also assert their own cultural traditions. De Certeau's theory has further assisted me in exploring how characters transform places into lived spaces. In Ali's *Brick Lane*, for instance, the protagonist appropriates the Western sport of ice-skating rink through acts of subversion, which is by skating in her sari in London.

I have explored how cities in Britain and America become the dream destination for the South Asian immigrants. With the help of the theories of Mitchum Huehls, Rachel Smith Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, I have pointed out that the individual freedom that the diasporic women in the neoliberal cities acquire is an illusion. This is because, ultimately, they are bounded by the demands of the neoliberal market economy. Theories on neoliberal cities have been useful for my analysis as I have shown that even though the freedom these cities offer is an illusion, they provide the female characters with the opportunity to become financially independent. Based on the theories of Arjun Appadurai and Homi Bhabha, I have drawn a parallel between the attitude of diasporic women and cosmopolitan dispositions. I have read female characters as transnational migrants called "vernacular cosmopolitans" (Bhabha xiii). They move in-between cultures and they either find a hyphenated identity, as Ashima; an alternative identity, as Moushumi, or identify themselves more with the host culture than their parental traditions, as Sonia. I have also pointed out that Bhabha's vernacular cosmopolitans belong to the marginalized section of the society and are far from being elites, which is evident in Mukherjee's and Ali's novels.

With the close reading of the literary texts and the cinematic narratives I have highlighted the limitations and boundaries female characters face in the neoliberal cities. For instance, Mukherjee's protagonist, who gets a job in New York City as a caregiver, is forced to run away to Iowa after she encounters her husband's murderer in a park in New York City. To escape from the memories of her trauma, Jasmine leaves New York. I have shown that in a neoliberal society, the marital and financial status of the protagonists become one of the primary determining factors of female empowerment. The narratives suggest that the neoliberal cities cannot really be regarded as liberating spaces despite the benefits that they

offer to the female characters, since migrants also experience exploitation as they become involved in the market economy. It has also been foregrounded that it is not only intersectional differences that have an impact on whether characters are able to participate in the market economy to their own advantage, but also their individual dispositions. For example, in contrast to Nazneen, who is less privileged financially and starts working in a garment business, Mrs. Sen, a middle-class woman, shows no significant attempts to work outside the house. Therefore, though Western cities play a significant role in the formation of female identities, the empowerment of the diasporic women not only depends on the opportunities that the neoliberal cities offer but also on individual efforts. I have argued that geographical places in the West may be transformed into empowering spaces. The impact of Western settings on diasporic female identities has been analysed by dividing the locations into private places, for instance, the kitchen and the apartment in *Brick Lane* and in *The Namesake*; public places, such as the streets of Boston and London in *The Namesake* and in *Brick Lane*; the interiors of the vehicles, such as the car in “Mrs. Sen’s” and the bus in *Bhaji on the Beach*, and finally, transitory places, for example, the football ground in *Bend it like Beckham*, the ice-skating rink in *Brick Lane*, and the seaside in *Bhaji on the Beach*. This division has helped me understand how identities are constituted at different scales. For instance, the apparently claustrophobic private places turn out to be refuges for the protagonists, as is seen in the case of Mrs. Sen, who displays her culinary skills in her living room. Public places are often transformed into empowering locations, which I have shown relying on theories of flânerie. For example, Nazneen contests the patriarchal norms of her home countries by stepping outside the apartment. Relying on Saroukhani’s notion of “vehicular cosmopolitanism” (Saroukhani 12), I have analysed how interiors of vehicles can become empowering sites. In Lahiri’s short story, for instance, Mrs. Sen’s decision to drive the car without her husband’s assistance, which she earlier disliked, can be considered as a cathartic event. Transitory spaces, as defined by Winnicott, are also transformative locations. In these spaces the characters not only perform acts of subversion, such as mimicry, but they also redraw the boundaries of their selves.

My dissertation has showcased that female characters perform strategies such as “mimicry” (Bhabha 122) and parody, which I have read as acts of subversion. Specific episodes from the narratives have helped me explore the way female characters subvert Western norms, which occur mostly at transitory sites. For example, Nazneen’s ice-skating in her sari is an example of mimicry. Ali’s protagonist, who has not even been able to

pronounce the word “ice-skating” at the beginning of the narrative, masters the art of this Western sport by the end: ice-skating becomes a form of conquest for her as she imitates the traditions of the host country yet, due to her skin colour and attire, presents a difference that is “*almost the same but not quite*” (Bhabha122, italics in the original). I have probed further into subversive strategies and included parody in my analysis, which challenges the patriarchal norms of the characters’ home countries in Chadha’s films. In *Bhaji on the Beach*, for instance, Chadha employs larger-than-normal images of a Hindu god in the opening scene at the grocery store of one of the first-generation Indian female characters. Other examples of parody include the use of loud Bollywood music to portray the emotional state of the female characters in *Bend it like Beckham*, tabooed social issues such as Asha’s vision of Hashida smoking in a Hindu temple, and the apparition of Jess’s family members in front of the goal post during one of her football matches. The transformation of the diasporic characters in the Western cities has been represented not only through their physical displacement from one place to another, but I have also showcased how this displacement leads to psychological changes. Mukherjee’s protagonist, for instance, copes with severe traumatic experiences in the West. Other characters often become less judgemental in the narratives: for instance, Ashima in Lahiri’s novel is more ready to accept Sonia’s half-Jewish and half-Chinese boyfriend than she has been with Gogol’s American girlfriend at the beginning of the novel. The transformation of identity is also symbolised by the changing names, as Tilo’s and Jasmine’s stories reveal. Furthermore, financial independence has an impact on the identities of the protagonists. For instance, Nazneen, after she starts to work, is gradually transformed from a shy woman to a more confident individual.

My dissertation has also explored the intersectional differences that characterise diasporic female characters, that is, differences based on religion, class, marital status, language and race. I have analysed these differences relying on Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality and Brah’s definition of identity in the diasporic context. As I have discussed, among other categories such as class and language, the difference based on religion is the most recurrent theme in the narratives, and the most significant aspect of diasporic female identity. For example, Ashima, Mrs. Sen and Tilo, who are Hindus, enjoy a comparatively more privileged positions in the Western cities compared to Jess, who is a Sikh, and Nazneen, who is a Muslim. Apart from religious issues, other differential categories that I have explored include social exclusion due to poor knowledge of English. I have analysed the difficulties faced by the characters owing to the language barrier. For

instance, in contrast to Nazneen, who is shy to interact with her neighbour because of her poor English, Tilo and Jasmine are more outgoing and find it easier to connect with American people because of their fluent English. In addition, marital status, that is, whether the female characters are married, unmarried, or widowed, is also a significant aspect of their identities. As is evident from the narratives, protagonists who are either widowed, such as Ashima and Jasmine, or separated from their husbands, as Nazneen, are able to acquire agency and become more empowered compared to characters who are emotionally and financially dependent on their husbands, for example, Mrs. Sen.

I have highlighted the significance of solidarity as an aspect of female empowerment. As I have argued, solidarity depends on the recognition of intersectional differences. As discussed, both male and female characters act as catalysts in the protagonists' empowerment. With specific examples from individual narratives, I have analysed the role played by them: characters such as Nazneen's friend, Razia and Karim, the young boy who delivers sewing material in *Brick Lane*, Jess' football coach, Joe and her playmate, Jules in *Bend it like Beckham*, Lillian, Kate and Mother Ripplemeyer in *Jasmine*, and Raven in *The Mistress of Spices*. These characters have participated in the bildung of the female protagonists, though their level of participation has varied in the narratives. Furthermore, I have also probed into the unequal power relations that exist between the characters, for example, the differences between Jasmine, who comes from the Third World and Mother Ripplemeyer, who is from the First World. From my discussion it can be understood that despite these differences characters strive for cross-cultural solidarity, which is primarily based on empathy that calls for understanding and compassion. Furthermore, the recognition of differences also becomes significant in the case of diasporic characters: for example, the recognition of the age gap between first- and second-generation Indian characters in Chadha's films.

With the help of Brah's notion of "homing desire" (Brah 189), I have explored the ways in which diasporic women, especially first-generation immigrants, have recreated traces of their home culture in the host nation. Through letters, cassettes, clothes, music, and food, they relive their memories from home. Food is one of the most significant aspects of homing desire: even in the absence of authentic ingredients, diasporic women insist on preparing traditional meals. Relying on theories of Mannur, Nyman and Gallardo, I have highlighted that the consumption of food is not only a gastronomical issue in the narratives but it also becomes the primary expression of "homing desire." The recreation of a home-like space in

the diaspora helps characters deal with their alienation, rootlessness, and their crisis of belonging. My analysis has also revealed that besides being a medium of female expression, native culinary practices may even become a safe channel to release emotional anguish for the immigrants who experienced traumatic events, such as Jasmine, who otherwise distances herself from her home culture. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I have showcased that trauma is another significant reason why diasporic women migrate to the West, apart from accompanying their husbands. I have analysed different forms of trauma in the non-Western context: individual trauma, as is represented by the loss of Jasmine's husband in *Jasmine* and the loss of Nazneen's mother in *Brick Lane*, and collective trauma, which is represented by the riot between Hindus and Sikhs in Mukherjee's novel. I have further probed into how collective trauma can also be intergenerational. For instance, in Ali's novel, Nazneen is not only affected by her mother's suicide on the individual level: Rupban's death is a consequence of the patriarchal oppression transmitted to her intergenerationally. Although the protagonist moves to London, she is haunted by the memory of her mother's victimisation. Relying on the theories of Cathy Caruth, Jeffrey Alexander, Angela Connolly, and Ana Dragojlovic, I have shown that traumas are not, and cannot, be portrayed in an explicit way in the novels, yet there are several references to how the experience of the pain is associated with traumatic experiences which eventually haunt characters such as Jasmine and Nazneen. My chapter has also explored how these characters cope with their traumas in the narratives. As I have argued, though cross-cultural solidarity is presented as an ideal in Mukherjee's novel, in the end, it is not the support that Jasmine receives which helps her come to terms with the past, but the narrativisation of her own experiences.

Thus, my comparative analysis of the literary and the cinematic narratives has shown the ways in which financial and economic background, marital status and religion become some of the primary markers that differentiate diasporic female characters. Protagonists either have a financially secure background when they move to Western cities, as in the case of Ashima, Mrs. Sen and Mrs. Bhamra, or they become empowered to some degree due to their participation in the neoliberal market economy, for example, Jasmine, Nazneen and Tilo. The narratives I have studied, then, despite their different genres, map issues that are explored by social scientists working on class and migration within a different paradigm. Nevertheless, the question remains: what would have been the fate of the diasporic women had they belonged to culturally and economically less privileged strata in the neoliberal society? In other words, would these women still be able to gain agency in neoliberal cities had they

remained stuck in economically under-privileged positions? Moreover, had the neoliberal cities not proven to be a relatively safe place, at least for some characters such as Nazneen and Jasmine, who have escaped from the patriarchal oppressions and traumatic experiences, would these women be able to leave the oppressive traditions of their home countries behind? Although the narratives I have selected offered a rather positive conclusion about the empowerment of diasporic women, I hope my work can serve as a basis for further comparative analyses on the portrayal of South Asian migrants in contemporary literature, which may give different answers to these questions.

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