Representation of Queer Spaces: A Study of Select Contemporary Indian Diasporic Fiction

A thesis submitted to the Department of English, the University of Hyderabad, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctorate of Philosophy Degree

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Rameesa P M** (16HEPH03), hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis titled "**Representation of Queer Spaces: A Study of Select Contemporary Indian Diasporic Fiction**" carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Sireesha Telugu** is an original and independent research work. I also declare that no part of this work has been submitted previously in part or in full to this university or any other institution for the award of a degree or diploma.

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Further, the scholar has the following publications before the submission of her thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of her research.

- Paper titled "The Representation of Indigenous Cuisine and Culinary Practices in the Process of Identity Formation: An Analysis of Select Indian Diaspora Texts" in International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities (IJELLH), Volume 7, Issue 4, April 2019.

- Paper titled “The Role of Government and Non-governmental Organizations in the Integration of Returned Migrants: A Case Study of the State of Kerala, India in the Context of Covid-19” in *Migration and Diasporas: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2020. https://grfdt.com/Upload/JournalGallery/1_753326330_Rameesa%20P%20M.pdf
- Paper titled “Memory, Trauma, and the Representation of Alternate Sexuality: A Study of select Queer Narratives” in *Kala Sarovar*, a UGC- CARE listed journal by Kala Evam Dharma ShodhSansthan. (Volume 24, Issue 2, June 2021)

She has made presentations in the following conferences:

1) Presented a paper titled “The Role of Government and Non-governmental Organizations in the Integration of Returned Migrants: A Case Study of the State of Kerala, India in the Context of Covid-19” in an international e-conference on Migration, Diasporas and Sustainable Development, jointly organized by GRFDT, Migrant Forum in Asia, and CISAN, in November 2020.
2) Presented a paper titled “The Representation of Immigrant Identity and Urban Spaces: An Analysis of Parsi Settlement in Indian Cities with Reference to the Select Novels of Rohinton Mistry” in February 2019, at an International Inter-Disciplinary Conference conducted by University of Madras, Tamil Nadu.
3) Presented a paper titled “ The Significance of Food in the Process of Identity Formation: An Analysis of Select Diaspora Texts from Early Immigrant Writing to the Digital Representation” in February 2019, at an International Conference conducted by Anna Adarsh College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

4) Presented a paper titled “Reinventing the Female Self: A Cross-Cultural Reading of Indian and Pakistani Diaspora Texts” in February 2017, at an international conference conducted by REVA University, Bengaluru, Karnataka.

The scholar has also undertaken the following courses as part of the mandatory coursework to fulfill the UGC criteria for PhD submission for a total of 14 credits.

Course Code	Course Title	Credits	Pass/Fail
EN 824	English in India: Development of Indian English Literature	4	Pass
EN 830	The Indian Diasporic Novel	2	Pass
EN 872	Revisioning Postcolonialism	4	Pass
TS 872	Cartographies of Desire: Gender and Diaspora	4	Pass

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1: Diaspora and Queer Interface: A Critical Reflection

The lived experiences of the migrant population have always been an intriguing subject matter in literature. The writers of the Indian diaspora have played a significant role in reconstructing the colonial perception of the Euro-centric notion of India. Writers from the 20th century, like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vassanji, Kamala Markandeya, Uma Parameswaran, Vikram Seth and Bharati Mukherjee have played significant roles in rearticulating and reimagining Indian mythology, history, ancient legends, and cultural heritage. Crossing geographical boundaries have signified the cultural exchange among different nations, providing a different perspective on East-West encounters. The newer generation of Indian Diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Hari Kunzru and Anita Rau Badami explore the cultural conflicts and identity crisis of the immigrants, who are often trapped between two cultures. Commentators and critics like Robin Cohen, William Safran, Steven Vertovec, Avtar Brah, Arjun Appadurai, Uma Parameswaran, James Clifford, and Laxmi Narayan Kadekar have contributed to diaspora studies by identifying different types, structures, and characteristics of diaspora.

Among many, the representation of gender is an essential characteristic that many diaspora writers focus on. A gradual shift in the representation of gender can be vividly mapped out while we trace the history of diaspora literature. Initially, diaspora literature depicted gender in binary terms, following the sociological concept of male breadwinner theory—championed by

the renowned economist John Stuart Mill–where the male member is presented as the head of the family. Many early diaspora writers like Raja Rao and V S Naipaul depicted the struggles of male characters. Migration, in search of better employment opportunities and financial stability, can often be seen as a forced decision imposed on the male characters under the pretext of responsibilities and duties towards their families. The heteronormative notion of gender is based on the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. However, with the emergence of the feminist movement, writers began to reflect on its impact on the depiction of female experiences in diaspora writing. In the context of Indian diaspora writing, female voices like Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni remain important, as they initiated the transition of representing the "outside identity" from the perspective of an immigrant to the lived reality of an immigrant woman. They represent not only the experiences of victimhood with references to domesticity and patriarchy but also the stories of strong independent women who utilise diaspora as an effective platform for self-discovery. The protagonist's journey in Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is an excellent example of the same, who manages to outgrow all the hardships and discover her true self through migration. Diaspora literature witnessed a different turn in the latter half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, as the writers of different sexual orientations started representing the question of gender and sexuality in literature with much vigour and enthusiasm. As the studies indicate, from the 16th century onwards, the term 'queer' was used derogatorily to imply that homosexuality is abnormal and strange. In the late 1970s and 80s, activists of Queer Nation started using it as a symbol of resistance in their fight against gender discrimination and homophobia during the AIDS movement. Presently, the term "queer" stands as a collective site for different sexual orientations including LGBTQIA+. Lisa Hunter observes:

> Queer theory emerged from a foundation of several origins and influences including, but not limited to, activist and academic iterations of feminism, lesbian and gay movements promoting political transformation of recognition and rights for diverse sexualities, poststructural and postmodern theory, critical theory, radical race theory, postcolonial theory, disability and transgender studies. Normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality along with assumed relationships between the three, and a critique of identity categories and their markers resulting in social difference were all targets of queer studies and queer theory. Early scholars identified with queer theory include Butler (1990, 1993), Foucault (1988), Grosz (1995), Halberstam (1998), Hall (2003), Jagose (1996), Prosser (1998), and Sedgwick (1993). (Hunter, 2).

In world literature, prominent writers like Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Virginia Woolf have expressed the concepts of gender fluidity. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Langston Hughes' "Blessed Assurance" (1926), James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) depict various queer elements ranging from effeminate characteristics, homoeroticism in the usage of language, homosexuality, amongst many. Nevertheless, these writers were criticised and ostracised in attempting to engage with social stigma during their times. Contemporary South Asian diaspora writers in recent times have also started exploring the concept of sexuality and the formation of gender identity. The notion of sexuality is analysed by many diaspora writers expanding its nuances from the scope of feminism. Thus, LGBTQ or gay literature has become an emerging field of scholarship in the academic discourse.

The queer diaspora writers depict their alternate sexuality and gender norms as the perennial cause of identity crisis. Migration proves advantageous to many of the queer subjects or writers as it provides them with a platform to establish their sexual identity. Cultural conflict in the context of queer diaspora writing has greater significance than in the conventional notion of diaspora, as the subjects are expected to negotiate between the homophobic moral codes of the East and the presumably liberal lifestyle of the West. All the primary texts I refer to for the dissertation represent the stigmas associated with homosexuality in the Indian society. The authors of these texts not only represent the negotiation of cultural apparatuses but also attempt to establish the politics of gendered identities in the context of diaspora.

I refer to the following texts as my primary sources of the study. All these texts represent the diverse social realities of queer migrants. Minal Hajratwala's *Leaving India: My Family's Journey from Five Villages to Five Continents* (2009) is an autobiographical account of her family's journey from colonial India to Fiji. As she traces her family's history, the author examines the changes occurred in migration over time and the role of education in the lives of immigrants. The text also gives an insight into the author's life as a queer writer and activist in San Francisco. Rahul Mehta's *No Other World* (2017) depicts the intricacies in the lives of first and second-generation immigrants in New York. The novel explores the differences in the lives of queer subjects in the context of Indian and the Western social structures. Kiran's journey as a gay in America takes a different turn when he travels to India in search of his lost homeland and meets a *hijra*[1] with whom he develops an unconditional bond. Further, Mehta has further explored the lives of gay immigrants in America in his collection of short stories titled *Quarantine* (2010). Mehta depicts the difference in the experiences of gay people from various

[1] Refer to the glossary provided at the end of the dissertation.

social classes in his narratives. Farzana Doctor gives a glimpse of bisexual relationships in her *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011). The novel explores the life of a young Muslim immigrant, Fathima, and the problems faced by her family as she reveals her sexual orientation. Doctor's *Stealing Nasreen* (2007) also presents how religion, morality, and tradition contradict with the notion of homosexuality. The novel revolves around the lives of the immigrant couple Nasreen and Shaffiq in Canada. It further explores the social stigmas associated with lesbian relationships. *My Magical Palace* (2012) by Kunal Mukherjee narrates twofold experiences of immigrant lives. In the first section, the novel focuses on the lives of the Bengali community in Hyderabad. This section also narrates the protagonist's confusion and bewilderment over the realization of his sexual preference. The author explores how the protagonist's attempts to hide his sexuality affect his relationship with his parents. The second section narrates the story of the protagonist's life in the U.S.A., where he meets his gay partner. Unlike other texts, Neel Mukherjee's *A Life Apart* (2010) explores the lives of underprivileged illegal immigrants in London through the story of Ritwik, a twenty-three-year-old orphan from West Bengal. The novel also discusses the miserable plight of gay immigrants who are often forced into prostitution. *The Exiles* (2011) by Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla is a tragic tale of the protagonist Rahul, a wealthy banker in Los Angeles and Atif, a young Muslim illegal immigrant who works in a bookstore. In its depiction of love, desire, and marriage, the novel simultaneously draws attention to the lives of Indian immigrants in Kenya and Los Angeles. The novel explores how class, caste, religion, and nationality intersect with immigrant identity formation in the context of queer diaspora.

. My research trajectory thus focuses on the production of queer spaces by examining the politics of the body in heteronormative social structures and the role of queer trauma in

producing such spaces. This dissertation examines the politics of queer bodies in heteronormative contexts and focuses on socio-political, cultural, and psychological aspects. However, neither the writers chosen for the study nor their characters have undergone sex-reassigning surgeries. Therefore, transsexual/transgender experience is not a part of my study. The chapters on the politics of identity and trauma, thus, do not address the element of physical pain/ trauma followed by sex-reassigning surgeries.

Furthermore, the idea of space is different from the conventional notion of home spaces, nation, and immigrant community spaces (Little India/ Indian Ghetto), in the context of queer diaspora, as these spaces are centered on heteronormativity and social institutions like marriage and family. The production of queer spaces is affected and influenced by many external elements like race, ethnicity, class, and religion. These factors, in addition to their sexual orientations, play a decisive role in the existence of queer immigrants and their status as outsiders in foreign lands, in addition to their sexual orientations. The following are some of the significant concerns that I attempt to discuss in my dissertation:

- The politics of queer bodies.
- The importance of cultural markers with particular reference to the process of cross-dressing.
- The representation of queer trauma.
- The production of queer spaces.
- How do the body and trauma act as tools in producing queer spaces?
- How do race, religion, and class problematise the queer immigrants' existence?
- Changes in the notion of home space.
- How do symbols and images play an essential role in the queer narrative?

- Understanding the question of queer immigrant identity regarding the concept of 'other', 'in-betweenness', and 'third space'.

1.2: Research Hypothesis

The following are the research questions that this dissertation attempts to address:

1) How is the process of queer-diaspora identity formation depicted in the select literary texts?
2) How does intersectionality affect the diasporic experiences of queer subjects?
3) Is diaspora presented as an escape mechanism from homophobia by queer writers?
4) How do the politics of queer body and representation of queer trauma act as the decisive factors in the production of queer spaces?
5) How do literary representations contribute to the changing structure of public-private distinction concerning the production of queer- inclusive spaces?

1.3: Literature Review

There is a substantial body of work on South Asian queer writing examining the socio-political aspects of queer existence in foreign lands. Considering the popularity and reach of visual media, some studies pay attention to the representation of minority gender in films as well.

Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2007) is one of the most cited critical analyses of South Asian queer studies. Gopinath's arguments are centered on female sexuality and the representation of queerness in South Asian popular music, the Bollywood and Hollywood film industries, and select works of V S Naipaul. She further explores the idea of queer homes, desire, and nostalgia with reference to Syam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), Ismail

Chughtai's Urdu short story "The Quilt" (1942), and Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996). The text also introduces "the ways in which discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration" (3).

Sucheta Mallick Choudhuri's dissertation submitted to the University of Iowa, titled *Transgressive Territories: Queer Space in Indian Fiction and Films* (2009), is a comprehensive study on the nature of queer community spaces as presented in select texts by Indian writers. She analyses the diaspora element as an extension of "alternative cartographies of desire," which provides a platform for reconfiguring a "queer utopia." However, the main body of the dissertation analyses queer spaces in India and the trauma that the members of the queer community undergo regularly. Her dissertation provides an insight into the heteronormative mechanism which problematises the existence of gender minorities within the structure of "Indian domesticity," with reference to the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore, Ismail Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (1941), and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002).

Exploring Gender in the Literature of Indian Diaspora (2015), edited by Sandhya Rao Mehta, is a collection of essays published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. The text, divided into three sections titled "Reading Gender," "Writing Gender," and "Performing Gender," examines the nature of masculinity and womanhood in the select works of Amitav Ghosh, Monica Ali, V S Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Salman Rushdie. In the chapter titled "Clothing, Gender, and Diaspora," the author Priyanka Sacheti observes the importance of traditional attire in immigrant lives as a deliberate attempt to embrace Indianness. She also observes that such practices are often gendered, as the burden on the women folk is an outcome of domesticity and patriarchy.

Meg Wesling's article "Why Queer Diaspora" (2008) focuses on the nature of "working class queerness" in the age of globalization. By examining the lives of the underprivileged among immigrants (illegal immigrants, labourers, etc.), she draws out the change in the pattern of "queer production." The subjects of her study are identified as the victims of the "sex industry" or "tourist- oriented prostitution" (36). Though Wesling's study is sociological — without any reference to diaspora literature—it must be considered an important benchmark in tracing the role of class in the representation of queer immigrants.

Queering India: Same–Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society (2002), edited by Ruth Vanita, focuses on the nature of queer life in "pre-colonial", "colonial", and "postcolonial" India. This text provides a comprehensive account of the social stigma associated with same-sex desire in Indian culture and many fatal incidents of homophobia in the 21st century. Vanita examines the element of homophobia in the Indian psyche through a detailed analysis of the controversy that followed the release of Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1998). This socio-political and historical study provides an understanding of the plight of individuals with alternate sexualities in India, who are often forced to flee from their homelands and settle abroad.

Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience (1996), edited by Russell Leong, is an interdisciplinary collection of personal narratives, critical essays, interviews, and creative writing by a cluster of South Asian, Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese writers, and critics. The text focuses on issues related to AIDS and homosexuality, identity politics, gay-lesbian activism in the USA, and female desire. An attempt to eliminate the image of "model minority," a commonly perceived heterosexual model of South Asian immigrants in the USA, is also reflected in the text.

These are the significant essays and works on South Asian gender writings. However, an exclusive study on the nature of Indian queer diaspora narratives in literature is yet to be attempted, and I hope this study will fill up this gap in existing scholarship by focusing on the selected works by six contemporary diaspora writers of Indian origin.

1.4: Rationale

My interest in the area of queer diaspora lies in the fact that the experiences of queer Indian immigrants in foreign lands reflect the constant struggle they endure in negotiating sexual orientations inclusive of their racial/national identities. The notion of double alienation, which characterises the works of Afro-American feminist writers like Toni Morrison, can also be adapted to study the context of Indian queer diaspora writing. Morrison's notion of double alienation primarily refers to discrimination based on skin colour/race and gender. Similarly, the process of "othering" takes a distinct turn as the representation of gender is extended to the experiences of alternate sexual subjects. Minority genders among immigrant communities require more attention in the socio- political contexts, and the academic realm as the queer immigrant identity presents a different understanding to the postcolonial notion of the 'other'. As Gayatri Gopinath observes:

> By narrating a different history of South Asian diasporic formation, a queer diasporic archive allows us to memorialize the violences of the past while also imagining "other ways of being in the world", as Dipesh Chakravarthy phrases it, that extend beyond the horizon of dominant nationalism (21).

Surprisingly, there is a significant gap in the representation of gender experiences in the existing scholarship. For instance, the discussion on gender dynamics in the context of the diaspora

cannot be found in Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* [one of the essential texts for any critical studies on diaspora writing]. While tracing out the history of diasporas from the pre-colonial era to the cosmopolitan age, Cohen does not provide any reference to gender minorities.

Secondly, most of the critical texts on South Asian queer diaspora limit their study to certain prominent writers like Hanif Kureishi, Vikram Seth, Raja Rao, Shyam Selvadurai, V S Naipaul, etc. For example, Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2007), considered the first important comprehensive critical study on the area, is restricted to the select works of V S Naipaul, Shyam Selvadurai and Shani Mootoo. On the other hand, she gives a very detailed account of popular cultures, including many renowned films like *Fire* (1998), *Surviving Sabu* (1998), and *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985). Considering the importance and popularity of different forms of popular culture in this age of technology, one cannot question Gopinath's emphasis on films. However, her tendency to limit the review of the literature to certain prominent writers may lead to canonization of South Asian Writing. Consequently, this limits the scope of exploring the magnitude of queer immigrant experiences perceived and presented by contemporary diaspora writers, to both the reading and research communities. Hence, I intent to discuss the identity crisis of queer immigrant subjects of Indian origin, with reference to the select texts from an intersectional point of view.

The dissertation also aims to analyse the role of literature in contributing to the normalisation process of the queer. A detailed analysis of all the select texts would provide an understanding of how the queer diaspora writers represent the body, sexuality, and desire; and try to make an impact on the reading community by familiarising the deviant or normalising the 'abnormal' or 'other'. With the emergence of the feminist movement in writing, themes like the female body, sexuality, and desire achieved a platform for manifestation or representation of

gender experiences. Queer writers' attempt to sensualise the sexual act is often subjected to criticism. In doing so, the writers portray the intricacies involved in the existence of a marginalised section, which is unknown to the mainstream reading community.

To study how the queer spaces of belonging are documented in the primary texts, I borrow Homi K. Bhabha's idea of "third space," a celebrated concept in the context of diaspora writing. However, the larger framework of the dissertation is to understand the importance of the body/ politics of the body and the markers of identity. Furthermore, it analyses how such factors act as tools in the formation of queer spaces in the diaspora.

1.5: Methodology

My dissertation aims to closely read the select texts by contemporary Indian queer writers, drawing upon theoretical frameworks and critical analysis of various aspects related to heteronormativity, politics of the body, markers of identity, and the formation of queer spaces. Considering the research area's nature, I intend to follow an interdisciplinary approach in my dissertation and will further incorporate ideas and concepts from select sociological and psychological critical texts, literary criticism and theory. For this purpose, I have been keeping a track of the recent works and articles by the select writers, such as personal blogs and queer writers' forums published on new media platforms. During the research period, I visited Sahodara Foundation, an NGO working towards the sexual awareness and health care of the transgender community-based in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, India. I have also contacted a few queer activists in Banglore, India. The visits and interactions with the community members have helped me collect relevant information and understand the lived realities of queer subjects.

1.6: Theoretical Framework

My research area is divided into three sections that constitute the three core chapters. The following are the theoretical and critical texts that I will be focusing on in order to analyse my primary texts and to support the research arguments:

On the Politics of Body:

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (1993) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) are the three major texts that I have incorporated in this section in order to discuss the idea of heteronormativity, performativity of gender, and the idea of the 'closet'. In addition, observations made by Adrienne Rich in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) and Rosa Ainley in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies, and Gender* (1998) are used to discuss the concept of 'deviant bodies'. Gayatri Gopinath's arguments on female sexuality and desire as discussed in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2007) are considered in the context of the queer Indian diaspora. While discussing the 'performativity' of gender and 'gender parody' Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provide a few crucial details on the idea of cross-dressing and drag. *Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender* (2018) by Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough is a comprehensive study on the history of cross-dressing and explore how its nature has changed in contemporary American culture. Shaun Cole's *Sexuality, Identity, and the Clothed Male Body* (2014) and Maja Gunn's *Body Acts Queer: Clothing as a Performative Challenge to Heteronormativity* (2016) are two primary texts that examine cross-dressing as a mode of resistance against heteronormative norms of the society. In addition, I have also looked at Richard Ekins' article "On Male Femaling: A

Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-Dressing and Sex- Changing" (1993) and Gail L. Hawkes' "Dressing- Up, Cross-Dressing and Sexual Dissonance" (1995) in order to understand the process and implications of cross-dressing in detail.

The role of cultural markers in the diaspora is studied in detail with reference to the ideas discussed by Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996). She discusses the cultural identity of Asian immigrants by exploring various aspects like gender, nationality, sexuality, and class. She emphasises the idea of 'difference' and 'diversity' in the context of diaspora. I have taken specific ideas from Jennifer B Delisle's *The Newfoundland and Diaspora: Mapping the Literature of Out- Migration* (2013) and Joanna Story's "The Impact of Diaspora: Markers of Identity" (2016).

On Queer Trauma:

Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (2004) and Michelle Balaev's *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014) are the two major texts that I have used to contextualise trauma theory and queer subjectivity. In addition, Balaev's "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" which appeared in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal,* is also referred to for the study.

I have borrowed from the renowned queer critic Riikka Taavetti*'s Queer Politics of Memory: Undisciplined Sexualities as Glimpses and Fragments in Finnish and Estonian Pasts* (2018) and Kaisa Ilmonen & Tuula Juvonen's article titled "Queer Traditions: Politics of Remembering" to analyse the significance of dreams and memory in the formation of trauma. I have referred to the ideas of well-known psychoanalysts, Carl G Jung, and Freud. Jung's *Man and His Symbols* (1964), to understand the importance of symbols and images, and analyse them

as narrative tools to compliment the subject matter. S A Mitchell and Black, M. J's study on Freud, *Freud and Beyond* (1995) are the texts that facilitated the idea of the importance of symbols and images. Considering the use of animal images in the primary texts, I have also referred to Eugenia Shanklin's article "Sustenance and Symbol: Anthropological Studies of Domesticated Animals" (1985).

On Queer Space:

Queering India: Same–Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society (2002) by Ruth Vanita and *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience* (1996) by Russell Leong are two important texts that provide a detailed sociological account of homosexual experiences in Indian and Western societies. Both these texts examine the intricacies of gay-lesbian existence in heteronormative spaces. J Matthew Cottrill's *Queering Architecture: Possibilities of Space(s)* (2006) addresses the issue of homelessness among queer youth in Chicago. Although Chicago has a robust strong queer community base, its members are often subjected to discrimination based on gender. Cottrill examines the question of queer identity in the context of urban spaces in his work. Similarly, he explores the possibilities of informal gatherings in urban spaces for the queer youngsters. I have also looked at Sucheta Mallick Choudhuri's *Transgressive Territories: Queer Space in Indian Fiction and Films* (2009) as she analyses the representation of queer spaces in select Indian fiction and films. I have borrowed Martin F Manalansan's observations from "Out There': The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City" (2003) and "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City" (2005).

1.7: Backdrop and Chapter Layout

My dissertation on contemporary Indian queer diaspora writing is an attempt to understand various manifestations of gender fluidity and how it problematises and negotiates immigrant sensibility. The research trajectory examines the representation of queer spaces, by focusing on various aspects like the body, representation of trauma, memories, identity markers, symbols and images, and the role of class, religion and race. The dissertation studies the role of these factors as tools in shaping queer spaces and the process of identity formation from an intersectional point of view. The following are the three core chapters of the dissertation:

- Representation of the Queer Body: Reading the Contemporary Diasporic Narratives.
- Queer Diasporic Trauma: An Analysis of Memory, Dreams, and Symbols as Literary Devices
- The Production of Queer Spaces: A Critical Enquiry into the Spaces of Belonging.

1. Representation of the Body: Reading the Contemporary Diasporic Narratives

The theoretical framework of this chapter is based on the arguments and observations made by Michael Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In his analysis of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the critic Tasmin Spargo observes that "the body is not naturally 'sexed', but becomes so through the cultural processes that use the production of sexuality to extend and sustain specific power relations" (55). Influenced by Foucault's ideas on gender and the body, Butler argued that the "body has a materiality that precedes signification" (76). She questions this mainstream understanding of the body in terms of binaries by introducing the idea of the performativity of gender.

The dissertation focuses on the politics of the body and identity crisis by analysing how the body can also be perceived as a socio-cultural product, and not only as a biological entity. Understanding the body only in biological terms may lead to the emphasis of specific power structures or institutions like religion and family. Such institutions have played a significant role in propagating healthy body image in terms of binaries, i.e., male and female bodies, thereby restricting and regulating the existence of queer bodies.

Queer bodies are always considered deviants, and subjected to "other" status. The stigmas associated with gender fluidity are deeply rooted in the psyche of mainstream society, as the notion of masculinity and femininity limits the manifestation of a different body. British anthropologist Dame Mary Douglas has explained the necessity and importance of symbolic boundary maintenance in her work, *Purity and Danger* (1966). She argues that "taboo is a spontaneous device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe… taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred" (11). Stigmas associated with alternate sexuality often lead queer subjects to be secretive about their body and sexuality. Coming out in homophobic societies like India often remains impossible, and thereby, force queer subjects to project themselves as "normal" by hiding their desire and sexuality. The notion of self is problematised in such instances, where the intricate inner self is victimised and the outer self/projected self is constantly under pressure for social acceptance.

Heteronormativity, a social system in which heterosexuality is considered as the norm or normal, complicates the notion of visibility. As I have already mentioned, queer subjects in their attempt to conceal their sexuality for the sake of social acceptance and desperately trying to fit themselves into either masculine or feminine gender roles in homophobic societies, are denied

their fundamental human rights. The fear and anxiety of accidentally revealing their true self and being visible can be seen as a common characteristic in most primary texts.

Rahul, the protagonist in Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace* (2012), narrates his first encounter with the homophobic classroom in the given excerpt:

> 'Amit wrote a love letter to Rohit. Rohit showed it to me after football practice. And I told Mrs Joshi'. As soon as Suresh had said this, there was a huge commotion. 'Arre, yaar, Amit is a bloody homo!' several of the boys shouted indignantly. I did not understand what it meant and why everyone was getting so upset... 'What is a homo?' I whispered to Ranjan. He looked at me with scorn, delighted by my ignorance ... 'Amit wrote a love letter to another boy. Of course he is a homo. It's not normal.' Grimacing, he pretended to vomit. ... That evening, when I went home, my mind was in turmoil. This was the first time that I had seen such disgust directed at anyone for doing what I have done—write a love letter (19).

This incident instilled a sense of fear in the protagonist, which made him realise the fact that revealing his sexual preference to society would bring nothing but shame to his entire family. Butler opines that homosexuality is opposed on the grounds of disrupting a social order which ensures "coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire" (*Gender Trouble*, 17).

On the other hand, "coming out" does not provide a permanent solution for queer subjects. Though "coming out" is an outcome of a deliberate attempt by the queer subjects to be visible in the society, to reveal their original self, they remain subject to the biases of mainstream

society. It is essential to look at the concept of "the closet" as explained by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), where she explains how societal notions of gender constrain the movement of queer subjects. "Visibility" followed by "coming out" does not ensure equality. Instead, the queer subjects prepare to be identified as the "other" and embrace their sexuality. One concept I will focus on in this chapter is the notion of "visibility." The following are a few concerns that I have addressed in this chapter regarding my primary texts.

- How do social institutions like family and marriage encounter alternate sexualities?
- How do the binaries, in terms of masculinity and femininity, attribute deviant status to the queer body?
- How do visibility and performativity act as a mode of resistance?
- How does immigration affect the idea of visibility?
- Does visibility reclaim queer history in the context of diaspora?

The idea of visibility is presented in a complex manner by authors like Rahul Mehta. Given the benefit of education and assistance from the queer communities in the locality, the protagonist in Mehta's *Quarantine* (2010) embraces his sexuality. Nevertheless, he is forced to be submissive to the moral codes as he returns to his domestic space.

> Last week when I called my mom to discuss plans for our trip, she said it was better not to tell Bapuji that Jeremy is my boyfriend. "There is no way he could understand," she said… She said we shouldn't sleep in the guest room because there is only a double bed there, and it will be obvious we are sleeping together.

> Better we set up camp in the basement where there is a double bed and a single bed and a couch (Mehta, 4).

Though the family can accept the emotional bond between the protagonist and his partner, physical intimacy among two male bodies is beyond their comprehension, and thus, forcing the visible to be invisible. Sexuality and desire remain subjected to heteronormativity in domestic spaces, and visibility requires different spaces of belonging for its manifestation. On the other hand, Fatima, the protagonist in Farzana Doctor's *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011), projects her body as a medium to communicate her sexual and political ideologies rejecting the patriarchal values of her family. In her fight against religious fundamentalism and patriarchy, she celebrates her body by reclaiming queer history. The chapter emphasises the ways in which the queer body responds and negotiates with heteronormativity, which might pave way for the formation of queer spaces of belonging.

2. Queer Diasporic Trauma: An Analysis of Memory, Dreams, and Symbols as Literary Devices

This chapter focuses on the representation of memory, dreams, and symbols in portraying personal and cultural/historical trauma. The objective of this chapter is to analyse the role of trauma as a tool/agent in the production of queer spaces. The psychological trauma of being identified as the 'other' in mainstream society is further analysed. Similarly, the impact of racism in the diasporic discourse is also argued in the chapter. As Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora* opines:

> It is not necessary for biological characteristics to be fore grounded in each and every racism, but, if a phenomenon is to be identified as racism, the collectivity signified within it must be represented as being 'inherently different'. Contrary to positions which construct racism as a transparent technology of suppression and oppression, processes of racialisation do not always occur in the matrix of simple bipolarities of negativity and positivity, superiority and inferiority, or inclusion and exclusion (155).

The "visibility" of an immigrant in a foreign land is directly correlated with the projection of markers. In a multicultural environment, everyone is identified by certain identity markers. A detailed analysis of racial, cultural, and gender markers is attempted in the context of Indian queer diaspora writing in my dissertation.

The history of Indian diaspora writing reveals the writers' deliberate attempt to manifest Indianness through the element of nostalgia. Revival of the past and homeland in diaspora writing is achieved not just through memory, but by incorporating indigenous markers into immigrant sensibility. Critics Joanna Story and Iain Walker observe that "marking out the social boundaries of ethnic groups is part of the process of constituting a diaspora, and the maintenance of ties to the homeland (a crucial part of the definition) requires the reproduction of markers that allow … diaspora to assert their claims (140)".

Cultural markers like names, food habits, languages and religious or moral codes determine the formation of identity of the diaspora subjects, be it first-generation immigrants or their successors. Though it cannot be generalised, as immigrants from different age groups and socio-political backgrounds react differently to the values of their homeland, the immigrants

remain ‘outsiders’ in the foreign lands in varying aspects. Their racial features come to the forefront on being labelled as an ‘outsider despite their attempt to fit into the mainstream society. An excerpt from Neel Mukherjee’s *A Life Apart* (2010) is given below:

> Ritwik also realizes, in slow stages, that his is a type of minority appeal, catering to the ‘special interest’ group rather than the mainstream, because of his nationality, looks, skin colour. He keeps pushing the word ‘race’ away. The mainstream is blonde, white, young, slim. Or, more accurately, that is the desired mainstream (124).

The instances of land division in Rahul Mehta’s *No Other World* (2017), Farzana Doctor’s *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011) and Minal Hajratwala’s *Leaving India* (2009) also depict racial discrimination. “The newer houses were farther downhill where Kiran lived, in the small subdivisions that pooled off Sherman Road.” In contrast, the white men lived “midway up the hill... an A- frame” with better connectivity (Mehta, Rahul. 2). The protagonist Ismail in *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011), who has lived in an immigrant ghetto for decades, never witnessed a white family moving into the area. “Ismail and Rehna bought the Lochrie Street house in Little Portugal as a starter home... Over the following eighteen years, the neighbourhood shifted a little, taking on new tones and shades with each decade. Ismail watched the Portuguese kids grow up and move to the suburbs... He witnessed the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants move in, co-mingling with their Old-World European neighbours in uneasy and unfamiliar ways” (15). All these instances depict how race plays a crucial role in social discrimination.

Food has been an important cultural marker contributing to the formation of immigrant identity. A detailed account of Bengali cuisine in *My Magical Palace* (2012) is an epitome of

immigrant sensibility and nostalgia for the homeland. In her *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah examines the importance of food habits among diaspora communities. Brah opines that "food tastes and smells" can evoke memories of past homelands. She says that "diasporic subjects are often constructed as carrying the olfactory traces of past homelands on their bodies…it offers a framework for articulating a range of experiences connected to past and present places of habitation. Diasporic subjectivity is shaped by memories of past homelands that emerge through evocative aromas and inflect diasporic life in the present" (58). Similarly, Claude Fischler, a well-known French social scientist, identifies food as an important medium in establishing "a sense of collective belonging" among immigrants (*Food, Self and Identity*, 263).

Minal Hajratwala's ancestors in Fiji could successfully commercialise this nostalgia for native cuisine. With the massive inflow of immigrants into Fiji, Hajratwala's grandfather experimented with Indian food. He invented a fusion food to attract not only Indian immigrants but the natives and other immigrant labourers. Critics like Maureen Duru and Sidney Mintz have explored the possibilities and representations of fusion in food habits and culinary practices in the context of diaspora. Duru's recent work titled *Diaspora, Food and Identity: Nigerian Migrants in Belgium* (2017) presents how migrants adapt to the host country's food habits, yet retain Nigerian culinary skills. Duru opines that the food habits of immigrant communities play a decisive role in the formation of cultural boundaries, and thus, often a fusion of food habits is an ideal solution for the immigrants in order to reaffirm their heritage and nostalgia while getting assimilated into the culture of the host country. Hajratwala's description of Indo-Fijian fusion food can be seen as a natural outcome of immigrants' attempts to assimilate. Contrary to the earlier immigrant experience in Fiji, Hajratwala presents a different account of how Indian food

was looked upon with disgust in America. She says Indians were denied accommodation in the American colonies, as the 'natives' were irritated by the 'permanent... curry smell, in Indian households. It is the same stigma associated with Indian cuisine that instigated Pooja in *The Exile* (2011) to clean her kitchen rigorously and use agarbatis [incense stick] after each cooking session. At this point, food habits or memories related to indigenous cuisine complicate immigrant identity "represent discrimination on 'historic', 'national' or 'racial' ground" (Brah, 59).

A shift in the attitude of second-generation immigrants towards Indian cuisine can be traced through the characters Rahul in *No Other World* (2017) and Ajay in *The Exiles* (2011). If Rahul genuinely disliked Indian food, as his alternate sexuality urged himself to distance 'everything that is Indian' for he could never relate himself to Indianness, Ajay's decision to switch to American cuisine was a deliberate attempt to fit in the white men's world. The way how Rahul relishes his last American meal before his flight to India reflects how much of an 'American he has become'. Similarly, Ajay chooses "pan fried chicken breasts...with minimal seasoning" over "delicious sweets" or "thick spicy gravy," though he secretly enjoys Indian cuisine. Sidney Mintz comments on a similar attitude among immigrants towards food in his famous work *Food and Diaspora* (2007). He observes, "Ethnic foods in a country like the US have a special potency. Until recently, new migrants ate foods 'from the old country' privately and rarely in public. Their children wanted to be like 'other Americans' and did what they could do to conceal their background" (519). Thus, it can be analysed that the politics of food in the context of diaspora is not just limited to nostalgia, as it also represents their deliberate attempt to fit into mainstream society.

Queer diaspora writing witnessed a slight change in the depiction of identity markers, for a queer subject, being an 'outsider' is not just a result of their immigrant identity but rather an effect of their gender fluidity. The rationale for assuming alternate sexuality as the significant issue in the existence of the queer subject, rather than their immigrant status, would be further explored in the following chapter of my dissertation by analysing how the queer immigrant becomes an 'outsider' even among the Indian community members. In queer diaspora writing, clothing - or the process of cross-dressing to be specific becomes an important marker of identity. Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough define the process of cross-dressing as:

> It ranges from simply wearing one or two items of clothing to a full scale burlesque, from a comic impersonation to a serious attempt to pass as the opposite gender, from an occasional desire to experiment with gender identity to attempting to live most of one's life as a member of the opposite sex (*Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender*, 7).

Cross-dressing can be looked upon as an expression of gender fluidity and can also be seen as a mode of resistance against heteronormativity. In cross-dressing, queer subjects decode and celebrate the notion of 'visibility'. According to Judith Butler, the notion of gender is inclusive of its 'citations'. While analysing the drag character Lily Savage [a fictitious female character who was portrayed on stage by a male performer/ artist] in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler observes that the identity of the character is not understood in terms of "chromosomes or hormones…the usual touchstones of biological decision", rather it is determined by various aspects like dress, make-up, and hairstyle. The character's physical appearance is in accordance with feminine attributes or the character 'cites' or 'quotes' female traits. Butler's analysis of the identity of a drag character establishes her view on the concept of cross- dressing and how cross-

dressing intersects with gender binarism. Thus, 'visibility' or coming out of 'the closet' as Sedgwick terms it is often attained through cross-dressing. However, the social response to cross-dressing as presented by authors like Rahul Mehta, Neel Mukherjee, and Farzana Doctor reflects that homophobia or transphobia is deeply rooted in the psyche of the mainstream. Mehta, in the latter section of the novel *No Other World* (2017), presents a detailed account of homophobia through the character of Pooja, a transsexual youth who was born as a boy and had been named Prakash. The life of 'Prakash turned Pooja' reflects the agony and pain of a victim, a gender variant, in a homophobic society like India. The process of embracing cultural markers and embracing alternate sexuality can affect the process of 'othering' in the context of queer diaspora. However, the chapter not only addresses the trauma experienced by the queer subjects in the host lands but instead explores the homophobic incidents during the formative years/ childhood that stimulated traumatic memories in the psyche of the queer subjects. This chapter also analyses the trauma experienced by the immediate family members of the queer subjects regarding the texts.

Another important aspect I focus in this chapter is the use of symbols and imagery in queer diaspora writing. Queer diaspora writers employ symbols and images in the narration as an effective tool to present various stages of identity formation, construction of gender roles in heteronormative socio-cultural institutions, and stigmas associated with alternate sexualities. More than a linguistic tool, symbols and imagery play an essential role in the subject matter in the context of queer diaspora writing. Queer writers often employ animal symbols and images to represent their repressed sexuality, desire and other erotic elements. Thomas Gale observes:

> …they combine haunting similarity with perturbing difference and proximity with otherness. Animals have long been the vehicles through which humans explore

> their own identities. Through the beast, humans fantasize of new possibilities and enact forbidden desires. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the most ancient functions of the animal is an erotic symbol. In ways both positive and negative humans have always realized that amatory desire is, like other bodily drives, a passion *Homosapiens* share with other animals (6).

Therefore, a detailed analysis of various symbols and images in the context of queer diaspora writing that depicts different manifestations of queer experiences is attempted in this chapter. For instance, Rahul's obsessive impulse to play with his sister's 'kitchen set' in *My Magical Palace* (2012) and Kiran's strange bond with a stuffed tiger gifted by his neighbour in *No Other World* (2017)suggest the impact of alternate sexualities in character formation at a very budding age. At this point, it is also essential to examine the role of institutions like families and schools in forming gender roles in children.

Kunal Mukherjee and Rahul Mehta have employed animal imagery in their writing. Pet parrots and mouse in *No Other World* (2017) stand for the clutches of domesticity. Whereas, brown fish, about which Shanti exclaims, "what a strange fate, to spend one's life swimming in this tiny pond, nowhere to go, just around and around, to be caught and released (81)", suggests the fate of immigrants who refuse to go back having tasted the benefits of being in first world, yet haunted by nostalgia-to their roots. Paper cranes are an affiliation of a junior boy's love towards Kiran.

Similarly, Kunal Mukherjee has used bats to symbolise the element of mystery and the horrors of the past. It is through the image of bats that the author conveys the tension of repressed sexual desires. A retired colonel, who lives in the attic, and the young protagonist look

at bats as a replica of their own identities. Mukherjee also uses the image of a weaver bird in his text to depict childhood innocence.

Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's recurrent reference to the ocean- both the Arabian Sea and the Atlantic Ocean plays a decisive role in the narration, as it suggests not only the ties to past events or memories but the complexities of gender fluidity as well. Thus, a detailed analysis of symbols and images as literary devices in the representation of queer trauma is also attempted in this chapter.

3. The Production of Queer Spaces: A Critical Enquiry into the Spaces of Belonging

Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands* (1987) is one of the most discussed autobiographical accounts of queer diaspora experience. Anzaldua negotiates with numerous binaries (gender, linguistic, cultural and racial) and introduces an image of a new woman, *mestiza*, who celebrates her lesbian immigrant identity against all the odds. Anzaldua says:

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races. I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/ religious male derived beliefs of Indo- Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture,... a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (102-103)

She was a victim of patriarchy, homophobia, and racial discrimination, yet she managed to strive for a new identity 'in-between', as a new border woman. However, the Indian queer diaspora

writers I have selected for my dissertation represent a different queer immigrant reality, as they constantly struggle to negotiate cultural and gender differences. Their alternate sexuality problematised their existence as an immigrant in the West. Gender fluidity of the queer diaspora subjects necessitated the formation of queer space, as they were treated as 'outsiders' in the homophobic homelands, mainstream western society, and immigrant community spaces in the West. For instance, Atif in *The Exiles* (2011) and Ritwik in *A Life Apart* (2010) were never accepted by their families in India as they revealed their sexual preferences. Even as they crossed geographical boundaries, they failed to be accepted by their fellow immigrant communities because of their sexuality. Similarly, financial instability also affected their process of assimilation. This chapter, therefore, focuses on multiple rejections of queer community members in different spatial zones that ultimately result in the formation of queer spaces.

Home space is an integral part of diaspora writing as the immigrant's sensibility is constantly searching for a platform for actualising a sense of belonging. The concept of home is constantly in flux as the subjects traverse the geographical boundaries. Wendy Walters observes that "the notion of diaspora can represent a multiple … and constructed locations of home, thus avoiding ideas of fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic exclusivity traditionally implied by the word home" (16). However, the close connection between home and national identity cannot be denied in the context of diaspora writing. There is a significant shift in the representation of home space by queer writers, as the element of nostalgia is often replaced with the horrors of living in a homophobic society. As India is highly heteronormative, and the society's moral codes annihilate fundamental human rights of queer subjects, immigration becomes a platform to escape from such moral values and embrace their sexuality. Thus, home and homeland often remain emotionally distant to queer immigrants.

However, immigration cannot provide a permanent solution to the problems of queer subjects, as the West is not entirely free from homophobia. Though factors like education and economic status can smoothen the process of assimilation, immigrants remain 'outsiders' in mainstream western society. Racial and national identity is subjected to segregation and discrimination in any multicultural environment. The formation of 'Little India' or Indian ghettos is an outcome of such segregation. As a miniature version of the nation, such community spaces are not free from heteronormativity. Queer immigrants remain 'outsiders' even in the national or regional community spaces as their sexual preferences are perceived as variants or 'abnormal'. Thus, queer subjects are subjected to double marginalisation or dual displacement in foreign lands. An excerpt from *No Other World* (2017) is given below:

> As soon as his father left, Kiran continued to do everything he could to avoid all Indians. Whether they were new immigrants ("fobs," Kiran called them, "Fresh Off the Boat" like the boy on his hall, like Kiran's own father had been thirty years earlier) or second generation Indian Americans (like Kiran himself), Kiran wanted nothing to do with any of them. To someone else, someone like Kiran's father, Kiran's actions might have seemed harsh and exclusionary, evidence even of some internalized racism,... For him, his actions were self- preservationist, preemptive. The reasons Kiran wanted nothing to do with these Indians was because he believed... that if they knew him, really *knew* him, they would want nothing to do with him (129).

Queer subjects are forced to distance themselves, either by choice or unwillingly, from the national/regional communities. The politics of queer diaspora is rooted in segregation, not inclusivity.

Alienation from the mainstream and immigrant communities unites people belonging to different gender minorities, ultimately forming queer spaces. Queer spaces, as presented by Indian diaspora writers, can be categorised into two major sections. Primarily the emergence of queer spaces in western academic institutions, followed by the post 1990s Queer Movement. The prime intention behind the formation of organisations for gender minorities is to fight for their rights, educate themselves, and critically engage with the notion of heteronormativity. *Leaving India* (2009) provides a detailed account of the author's engagement with such an organisation. She transformed into an active lesbian feminist activist from a self-doubting "brown-bodied" immigrant during her stay at Stanford University. She explored her sexual desires, accepted her "true self" by understanding the intricacies of queer existence, started writing as a mode of resistance and actively participated in "Queer Nation meetings" and "gay pride parades."

Further, Pubs and dance bars have become informal gathering platforms for many queer subjects. Writers like Farzana Doctor, Kunal Mukherjee, and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla portray a different dimension of queer space in their works. As an escape from the day-to-day chores of life, queer subjects visit such places and meet people belonging to gender minorities. Such meetings slowly develop into regular gatherings and often lead to the manifestation of their sexual desires. Fatima's peer "fun parties" at regular intervals as presented in *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011), Kiran's "night outs" in *No Other World* (2017), and Rahul and Andrew's visits to the pubs to live life to the fullest as depicted in *My Magical Palace* (2012) suggest the importance of such informal urban spaces in the lives of gender minorities.

On one hand, the queer space in *Leaving India* (2009) encourages the community members to strive for radical social changes. On the other hand, urban queer spaces like pubs and dance floors as presented in *Six Meters of Pavement* provide a temporary solace to the problems.

It is essential to explore the manifestation of a sense of belonging in queer spaces in detail as queer immigrants reshape and restructure the notion of home and community spaces. Another important aspect that I would like to focus on in my dissertation is the extent to which these queer spaces are accessible to gender minorities and how it negotiates the notion of 'visibility' in queer spaces through a detailed analysis of the characters. The role of race and class/ economic status in queer spaces is further analysed in detail.

1.8: Conclusion

The dissertation, therefore, focuses on the production of queer spaces concerning select texts by diaspora writers of Indian origin, such as, Minal Hajratwala, Rahul Mehta, Neel Mukherjee, Kunal Mukherjee, Farzana Doctor, and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla. While examining the nature of the queer spaces in the context of diaspora writing, I have analysed how the politics of queer body and the representation of queer trauma act as decisive factors in the production of queer spaces. Thus, the dissertation aims to understand the identity of gender variants as they cross geographical boundaries, i.e., bodies on the move.

In drawing attention to examples and instances from the select texts, the role of class, race, and religion will be examined in the formation and existence of queer spaces. The dissertation critically examines the manifestation of gender fluidity as both victimhood and a mode of resistance, looking at homophobia as a by-product of heteronormativity. The notions of "other," "in-betweenness," and "third space," the fundamental concepts of diaspora studies, can be seen in their modified forms as the idea of queer/queerness comes into play. I hope this critical study will provide a platform to understand different layers—socio, political, cultural, and psychological layers—of marginalisation in the discourse of queer migration.

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Chapter 2

Representation of the Queer Body: Reading the Contemporary Diasporic Narratives

2.1: Introduction

The process of identity formation in the context of queer diasporic narratives generally focuses on the politics of the body. The heteronormative social structure attributes the status of "other" and "deviant" to sexual minorities. This chapter explores multiple ways and trajectories in which the queer body responds and negotiates with heteronormativity. It addresses the research idea of whether migration is an escape mechanism for queer subjects by inquiring into the childhood experiences of queer issues and the representation of the migrant body. The emphasis on childhood in the study is derived from the recurrent references to homophobic encounters in literary texts. The authors assert that the politics of the body and its negotiations with heteronormativity begins in childhood. Therefore, the first section of the chapter focuses on the childhood experiences of the queer subjects as the beginning of the politics of the body. The stigma associated with gender fluidity in Indian society is discussed in detail, with reference to the literary texts. The discussion on the politics of the body is further explained in the following sections that address themes ranging from sexual desires to cross-dressing and bodily modification.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the representation of the migrant body. The homophobic childhood experiences of queer subjects often instigate them to cross boundaries. In this context, Andrew Gorman Murray observes that, "queer migration should be understood as

embodied search for sexual identity" (111). Yet, this seemingly promising pursuit does not ensure a fair social system for queer migrants. Moreover, the queer bodies thrive to survive in the host lands by negotiating constantly with class and race. Therefore, this chapter proposes a study of the significance of various cultural apparatuses in the lives of queer migrants, emphasising the racial and economic factors. The following sections are discussed in this chapter:

- Childhood and Identity Formation: An Analysis of Heteronormative Interventions
- Desire and Sexuality
- Representation of the Other/Deviant and the Formation of the Closet
- Cross-dressing and Bodily Modifications: A Multi-dimensional Manifestation of Queer Subjectivity
- Migrant Body

The theoretical references employed in this chapter are Lee Edelman's figure of *"*the child*"*, Sedgwick's idea of "the formation of the closet" and notion of "coming out", Richard Ekin's theory of "male femaling", and Kimberle Crenshaw's notion of "intersectionality". The significance of social institutions (family, marriage, and school) in the process of queer identity formation is also explored in this chapter. The notion of family honour and morality is analysed with reference to the observations by Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera. The section on the migrant body is developed on the arguments by Andrew Gorman Murray, Avtar Brah, Andrew C Okolie and Olivia Sheringham.

2.2: Childhood and Identity Formation: An Analysis of Heteronormative Interventions

"…the new-born infant brings sexuality with it into the world…" (Freud, *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children.* 19)

Sigmund Freud, in his pioneering work *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children* (1907), introduced psychoanalysis as a branch of study by analysing the development of sexuality in children. Freud established that sexual awareness in human beings begins from a very young, and kids can develop sexual fantasies and phobias in early childhood. He asserts that early childhood experiences play a decisive role in an individual's character development. Following the arguments of Freud, critic Sterling Fishman in his essay "The History of Childhood Sexuality" examines the role of religion, government, and medical practitioners in repressing sexuality under the disguise of morality, sin, and the notion of 'public health'. Sterling Fishman observed that "Freud did not solely rediscover childhood sexuality, he did forcefully and publicly affirm that childhood sexuality was normal" putting an end to the "dark ages of sexual suppression (279)". Fishman further observed that:

> In the post-Freudian climate of the twentieth century, there has been a complete volte face and childhood sexuality is now seen as a normal and natural expression of the infant and child, the suppression of which creates both individual and social problems. Even this brief outline indicates that the notion of normal and abnormal childhood sexuality, however much it may change, has become linked to the well-being of society as a whole (270).

However, this positive change in the post-Freudian social structures towards childhood sexuality had little contribution to the discourse of queer subjectivity, as mainstream social consensus was modelled upon the binarism in gender norms. Freud's study on childhood sexuality was also extended to the idea of "bisexual disposition". In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud observed that each human being inherently upholds the traits of both sexes. Interestingly, Freud's arguments on homosexuality were subjected to scrutiny, as he often

identified homosexuality as "inversion" and an outcome of a miserable or upsetting heterosexual experience. He opined that "those cases are of particular interest in which the libido changes over to an inverted sexual object after a distressing experience with a normal one (48)".

Erikson's theory of Psychological Development[2]establishes that identity formation originates in an individual's childhood experiences. Family is the first and immediate social institution a newborn is introduced to and, therefore, the most significant impact on the individual's sexuality. In the patriarchal social order, it is in the family where a child gets introduced to gender binaries. The binarism in the division between male/female or masculine/feminine qualities is presented through the images of mother and father figures. The child is trained to look at the relationship between their parents as the standard gender equation.

In Kunal Mukherjee's novel *My Magical Palace,* Rahul encounters difficulties due to his alternate sexuality in his family. Born in a strict Bengali family settled in Hyderabad, Rahul is forced to adhere to the mainstream notion of gender in terms of binaries. Initially, Rahul struggles to comprehend his thought process regarding sexual feelings. He understands that he is different from others, as he begins to fancy and develop a romantic interest towards his gender. Rahul understands the necessity of suppressing his sexuality at a very tender age under constant fear of being called a "homo" and treated with hatred. As a proud government servant who is treated with the utmost respect in the community, Rahul's father always reminds him of the responsibility and necessity of living a successful life. The father, who is a representation of patriarchy and morality, believes that the notion of success is deeply rooted in the social respect

[2] Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was a famous American –German developmental psychologist. His well-known psychoanalytical theory on the psychological development of human beings postulates identity formation as an evolving process through eight stages. Erikson introduced psychosocial theory by building upon the Freudian theory of psychosexual analysis. In his well-known work titled *Childhood and Society* (1950), he emphasises on the role of childhood experiences and social interaction in identity formation.

that a person earns by confirming and reasserting traditional and moral values. Thus, there was no scope for discussing topics outside the borderlines of traditional structures within the family, let alone homosexuality. As his parents were obsessed with family honour and goodwill, Rahul realises that the revelation of his alternate sexuality would bring shame to his parents, thereby; he chooses to remain evasive about his sexual identity.

Moral codes and values are central to the institution of the family in a traditional set up. Sociologist Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera's article "On the Importance of Family, Morality, Masculine, and Feminine Honor for Theory and Research" explores how family honour and morality intersect with gender roles. She focuses on the "interdependence" of the family members to maintain a "shared social image". As she observes:

> A family's honor is maintained when the family enjoys a good, positive image in the eyes of others. Importantly, the family's honor reflects on each family member's individual honor. If the family's social image is positive, the honor of each family member is maintained. If the family's social image is negative, the honor of each family member is compromised. This interdependence of the individual honor on collective… [constitutes what she termed as] *interdependence based on shared social image* (401).

Further, an aberration from the conventional notion of gender and sexuality had "serious repercussions for family members". Mosquera identifies "intense anger and shame" as the family's response towards "threats to their family's social image" (401). Therefore, the parents pass on the responsibility to safeguard goodwill and social respect. The concept of sexuality and gender is based on heteronormativity in the familial context.

In his novel *No Other World*, Rahul Mehta emphasises on the notion of morality and family honour. Mehta's protagonist Kiran is born and brought up in the West, thus giving the reader the illusion of a liberal lifestyle in the first section of the novel. Set in the socio-political context of 1990's rural America, the book explores the lives of two generations of migrants. The protagonist enjoys certain privileges that the family's financial security and social status have offered. The plot presents his father Nishit, a physician and mother Shanti, a banker, as successful professional migrants. As career oriented and competitive professionals, his parents spend a great deal of time in their respective workspaces, thereby, leaving the children to independent during their childhood. However, the Indianness[3] in his parents results in their occasional reminders of moral values associated with gender, which often confuses the protagonist and leads to self-doubt about his sexuality. The author further extends the notion of morality concerning the sanctity of marriages. The protagonist witnesses his mother being engaged in an extramarital affair with a white neighbour, Chris. The same incident becomes a turning point in his life, where he realizes that he is sexually attracted to the same person. Kiran's frustration and confusion over his thought process related to his body acquire more clarity as he understands his homosexual instinct. However, Kiran is also unable to be vocal about his sexual preferences, despite being in the West, as his parents "were a part of the popular crowd" (20). Since his extended family has settled in the US, Kiran is concerned about the goodwill of his parents if he chooses to embrace his sexuality publicly. Frequent family

[3] See Diana Dimitrova's *Imagining Indianness: Cultural Identity and Literature* (2017)
"Indianness denotes a particular Indian cultural identity that is inherent to India and can only be understood against the background of the plurality of India's languages, myths, religions and literatures—Its shared linguistic, literary, cultural, and religious history—that is, the ways Indians 'imagine' Indianness" (2)
"The notion of "Indianness" as a perceived cultural collective identity… is not a scientific or existing real category,… rather a fluid and ideologically coloured discourse that constantly changes over time and is being conditioned by the ideological orientations and positions of the specific period discussed". She has emphasized on "the importance of both nationalism and identity with regard to the study of otherism and otherness". (1)

gathering reminds him of the responsibilities and the sense of duty in protecting the goodwill of the family. Even as a child, Kiran knew that any sign of sexuality, let aside his homosexual instincts, would be subjected to scrutiny, thus, be suppressed. Kiran's childhood takes a traumatic turn at the age of eight when he gets physically intimate with a senior boy in school named Shawn.

At this juncture, it is essential to analyse Lee Edelman's construction of the figure, "the child". Lee Edelman, a well-known American literary critic and academician, has established his groundbreaking observations on queerness and childhood in his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), which is considered as one of the benchmarking works in the genealogy of queer theory. Edelman observes that the social order and political discourse require "the child", who is not only the representative of a particular age group but a theoretical construct, to examine the complexities in the development of sexual energy in an individual, to subscribe to specific values, or instead certain values are forcefully imposed upon them. Edelman used the term "reproductive futurism" to explain the condition and cause that forces the figure of "the child" to limit the possibilities of alternate sexuality. The protagonists in *No Other World* and *My Magical Palace* can be identified as Edelman's figure of "the child" [children], who are subjected to constant social conditioning. As "the child" is burdened with the notion of "reproductive futurism", the protagonists are forced to suppress their homosexual instincts.

Furthermore, Fishman identifies the role of parental intervention in children's identity formation. He opines that a child is a vulnerable being, who is "illiterate by virtue of age, barely audible in the bustle of daily life, usually ignored if not rejected", thereby subjected to parental intervention (269). According to Fishman:

> The 'history of childhood sexuality' provides an important means of examining the entire culture of childhood. Going beyond such obvious themes as sexual play, sexual fantasies, and masturbation, the study of childhood sexuality casts light into the entire arena of child-adult confrontation. It shows us the attitude of adults toward childhood sexuality, what they defined as 'normal' and 'abnormal' in children, and the authority they sought to exercise over the sexual lives of children (269).

In his *A life Apart,* Neel Mukherjee depicts an account of a queer subject who befalls to the repercussions of paternal interventions. Mukherjee's protagonist Ritwik is a victim of mental and physical abuse. The burden of family honour and heteronormativity shape him into an introvert. The constant beatings from his mother in his early childhood days remain a traumatic nightmare throughout his life. Corporeal punishment is considered as a parenting tool to mould the child into a perfect individual that society approves of. However, it is his mother's frustration and anger over financial insecurity and other family issues transformed into the mode of punishment, which ultimately instilled a sense of fear and anxiety in Ritwik. Parental intervention in Ritwik's childhood has a negative impact on him, as a result, he begins to develop resentment against the concept of marriage, family, and religion. His sexuality is depicted as a fearful hidden secret. Thus, the role of parental intervention in the formation of the notion of gender roles and suppression of sexuality cannot be denied. In their attempt to uphold what Edelman called "reproductive futurism", the institution of the family often adheres to the ideals of religious extremism. Consequently, homosexuality is labelled as a "sin" as it deviates from the conventional codes of morality.

Interestingly, all these characters were conscious of their bodies at a young age. Values and moral codes that were imposed upon them made them realise that they were "different" from other "normal" children, which forced them to suppress and be secretive about their sexuality. All these three protagonists remained confused and anxious, as they were exposed to the inevitable shame and rejection that could be brought together at the tiniest possible expression of bodily desire. Neel Mukherjee, Kunal Mukherjee and Rahul Mehta openly criticise that sex remains a taboo in most Indian families even in the 21stcentury. Gender fluidity was a concept beyond comprehension in all these families, as depicted by the authors, which was built upon binarism in the notion of gender.

Another important aspect that these writers try to emphasise is how paternal intervention creates a sense of hierarchy in male-female distinction. As a social institution, hierarchy and power structure are at the heart of each family in a patriarchal society. Rahul, Ritwik and Kiran become passive victims of misogyny and hyper-masculinity, throughout their childhood. The authoritative voice of their fathers and other family members dictated that men are privileged, given only the benefit of their gender. In *My Magical Palace*, the dichotomy in gender roles is depicted through the image of Rahul's father as a powerful dictator in the household and the mother as a dutiful wife. She obeys all the instructions given by her father.

Similarly, Rahul senses the distinction in allocating the duties and responsibilities to the girl child and the boy child. He was allowed to be a part of many of the conversations and meetings his father engaged with, whereas his sister was expected to assist the mother in the kitchen. Such instances made him realize that his male body is expected to perform manly tasks in the public realm, whereas a female body was meant to perform different duties, encapsulated in modesty, obedience, and tolerance. Similarly, *A Life Apart* also exposes the protagonist's

mother's ill-treatment by her husband and brothers. A realistic picture of a dutiful Indian woman under the clutches of patriarchy and misogyny is well portrayed through the mother's character. Even Shanthi, a banker by profession in *No Other World*, is expected to be in-charge of household chores. This distinction in domestic spaces can significantly impact children from a young age. As children depicted through the characters of Rahul, Ritwik, and Kiran undergo fear and confusion regarding their sexuality, such distinction of gender roles further complicates the reality for them as they desperately try to fit into these roles, yet miserably fail at times. Such masculine-feminine distinction often leaves no room for gender fluidity; rather, it problamatises the existence of queer subjects. The question of identity and self begins in childhood, as the children who belong to the gender minorities find it difficult to negotiate these values, moral codes, and frameworks set by tradition, religion, and heteronormativity, which consequently paves the way for an identity crisis.

2.3: Desire and Sexuality

As "the child" gets accustomed to the preconceived notions of sexuality embedded in patriarchy and designed by the heteronormative social order, the manifestation of his/her desire and sexuality becomes complicated. Body (in its physical sense), as a platform for the actualisation of the sexual desire and as a tool in establishing the politics of sexuality/gender is significant in the context of queer writing. As the formation of sexual needs occurs in "the child" at a young age, the social stigmas associated with alternate sexuality begin to have an impact on his/her psyche. The impression on the body, desire and sexuality as perceived by the queer subjects is affected by their interaction with other/ different bodies in its physical sense. Such interactions can mainly be classified into two. In the first place, the queer subjects witness the intimacy between heterosexual bodies, which leads to the realisation of heteronormative norms.

The second mode of interaction refers to the physical and emotional intimacy with the male or female counterparts, i.e., same-sex interactions.

It is discussed in the earlier section on childhood that family is the first and foremost institution where "the child" gets to witness the heterosexual mode of interaction. In their attempt to depict queer experiences, the writers[4] bring out the intricacies involved in the characters' dichotomy between the notions of sexuality. These writers discuss how witnessing the intimacy between the parents and realising that the accepted norm of bodily interaction is limited to heterosexual discourse. Consequently, that leads to introspection among queer subjects and the realisation of the idea of "other". The image of the father and mother is the epitome of normalcy and social acceptance in terms of gender roles and sexuality in all their works. Thus, the process of normalisation begins with the image of the father and mother.

Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace* explores the distinction between various gender roles and the values subscribed to them. The characters of the protagonist's father and mother, as depicted by Mukherjee, represent heteronormative gender norms by bringing out the divisive structure within the institution of the family. Mukherjee observes how the female members of the family, especially mothers, are restricted to the domestic space and portray the public spaces as the domain belonging to the male members. Such distinction of spaces could also represent the feminine and masculine values that are expected to be fulfilled by different genders, under the disguise of dignity and honour. It can be observed that, these divisive policies are essential for heteronormativity and patriarchy to survive.

[4]Rahul Mehta, Neel Mukherjee, Kunal Mukherjee, Farzana Doctor, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, and Minal Hajratwala

Similarly, in his novel *A Life Apart*, Neel Mukherjee presents the struggle of a middle-class mother to set a perfect example for her children by subscribing the notions of feminine gender roles. Interestingly, Rahul Mehta's *No Other World* also presents the distinction between the responsibilities of a father and mother, even though the mother's character in the novel is an educated, financially independent working woman. All these mother roles represent the hierarchy in the power structure regarding gender within the institution of the family.

Similarly, educational institutes act as another social structure that shapes and reaffirm the conventional notions of sexuality and gender in the child's life. As presented by these authors, educational intuitions can be looked upon as an extension of patriarchy where the queer subject is constantly under the surveillance of the authoritative figures of teachers. In addition, peer pressure is another critical component that affects and influences their perspective on sexuality and gender. Analogous to the father-mother interaction in families, the budding romance between young boys and girls is appreciated and accepted as the norm here, thereby reasserting the fact that the union of heterosexual bodies is accepted and identified as "normal". Interestingly, such realisation of the norms of gender and sexuality is not only a gradual learning process in the act of growing up, but a byproduct of their horrifying encounter with the reactions towards homosexuality in these institutions. At this point, the question regarding queer subjects or queer writers and the aspect of sexuality in childhood can be addressed. Their (the subjects' and writers') encounter with these "normal" heterosexual interaction, which paves the way for introspection, ultimately results in the confusion in coming to terms with their own "abnormal" sexual preferences and desires. Thus, it can be noted that the question of identity and self is interwoven with the notion of sexuality and gender in queer discourse, and such a complicated existential crisis can often be traced back to childhood experiences.

An excerpt from *My Magical Palace* is given below:

> The next day, Mrs. Joshi announced at assembly time that Amit had left the school… Amit Puri is not coming back to school. He…ah..he..ah,' Mrs. Joshi stammered. Then she paused and spoke again, choosing her words carefully: 'He behaved in a manner not befitting the high standards of the school.'… My fascination with Rajesh Khanna would most certainly be my downfall. I had written a love letter to him—if the school found out, I could be expelled. How foolish I had been! Mrs. Joshi should never know about it, I decided. Like Amit, I too would be in trouble if anyone found out. The boys would call me a 'bloody homo'! ...if I were a homo too, life would be unbearable at school and at home. 'Chhee…chhee…' my parents would say, shaking their heads sadly. I was suddenly seized with fear (20-21).

As Amit Puri gets expelled from school over his sexual preference, the protagonist realises that alternate sexuality is never accepted in his family or school. The fear and astonishment that this incident created in the mind of the young protagonist was further elevated as "the teacher skipped his name during roll call…as if he had never existed" (21). Thus, it can be argued that, contrary to the valorisation of union between heterosexual bodies, even the slightest trait of aberration of the gender roles and alternate sexuality was disdained.

In 2011, UNESCO conducted a conference in Rio de Janeiro on "International Consultation on Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions". The conference was aimed at reviewing homophobic bullying as a "threat to universal right to education". UNESCO identified bullying in schools and colleges as "a learned behavior…that reinforces or creates power based relationships and existing social norms… commissioned by patriarchy" (9). The conference

emphasised on the fact that "the harm inflicted through bullying is deliberate, persistent, and cumulative…It can be looked upon as physical, emotional, and social victimization" (11). The agony and pain that the writers depicted in their novels about the bullying that they have encountered in schools, is reflected in the report published by UNESCO,

> Those who are perceived to be different from the majority are most likely to be singled out for bullying. According to the United Nations World Report on Violence against Children (2006), most bullying is sexual or gender-based: both in terms of the selection of victims (i.e. largely affecting girls and those students perceived as not conforming to prevailing sexual and gender norms) as well as the nature of the abuse, with verbal bullying consisting predominantly of sexual and gender derogatory language. In particular, those whose sexuality is perceived to differ from the majority and those whose gender identity or behaviour differs from their assigned sex, are especially vulnerable. This reflects irrational fears of sexual diversity and atypical gender identity and is therefore described as homophobic8 or transphobic bullying (7).

Thus, bullying can be considered as a mechanism in reasserting binarism in gender norms. The way the binary between masculine and feminine traits was introduced to the children is depicted by some writers[5]. As boys, who are considered as the head of the family in the making, were not even allowed to express their emotional vulnerabilities in public. Both family and school play a crucial role in imbibing the morals and values regarding how a boy child is expected to behave in public. Similarly, the female members of the family were also trained to be feminine enough to

[5]Rahul Mehta, Kunal Mukherjee, and Neel Mukherjee

be desirable to their male counterparts, as perceived by conventional norms. Interestingly, while introducing the masculine- feminine binary to the children, they were also getting acquainted with the passive, or rather active in many cases, mode of hierarchisation in terms of gender. The stigmas associated with gender and sexuality forced the children belonging to minority genders to be private about their desire and sexuality, as they knew it would bring shame to the entire family and adversely affect the goodwill. As Pramod K Nayar opines:

> An important mechanism of regulating women's [in this case, queer subjects'] sexuality is through the discourses of morality. In fact, in most postcolonial nations sexuality is coded as morality: to be moral is to be monogamous, reticent about one's sexuality/ sexual preferences or even being asexual. Thus to articulate sexual desire or preference, or being promiscuous, is immediately classifies as 'immoral'. Further, in the age of AIDS, promiscuity and homosexuality readily get coded as potentially dangerous in a discourse that conflates the moral with the medical (150).

The following instance from *My Magical Palace* is considered at this point as it indicates the dynamics of morality with heterosexual and homosexual interactions that ultimately lead to the beginning of an identity crisis in the protagonist in his childhood. Rahul, the protagonist, develops emotional and physical intimacy with a senior, in school. Shubho, the senior instructs Rahul to keep their relationship a secret. Even though Shubho is equally involved in the relationship, he bursts out and becomes panicky once Rahul gives him a hand written love letter during a family event. Kunal Mukherjee gives a detailed account of rejection, shock, shame, and the insult that the protagonist undergoes at this moment. Despite knowing his sexual preference, Shubho choose to marry a beautiful young woman named Anamika, whom his family and friends approve of. Though Shubho is presented as a minor character in the plot, the author

strategically places the divorce news of Shubho in the epilogue as a remark on how homosexual subjects are victimised to societal pressure and the notion of morality.

Thus, it can be analysed that social institutions like family and school, play a crucial role in the normalisation of heterosexuality, which consequently nurtures the seeds of homophobia. The queer subjects are often forced to subscribe to the codes of morality, by suppressing their bodily desire and sexuality.

2.4: Representation of the Other/Deviant and the Formation of the Closet

Queer subjects realise that their identity and existence are subjected to surveillance and scrutiny as they get accustomed to the societal norms of sexuality under the disguise of morality. Terms like "homo" and "non" and the stigmas associated with them can be identified as the signifiers in the process of "othering", which begins in childhood. The history of the construction of "other" can be traced back to the works of Said and Fanon in postcolonial studies. In their attempt to examine the structure of colonialism and the production of knowledge, the postcolonial theorists Edward Said and Frantz Fanon have explained the relation between the centre and the margin/other, i.e., the imperial centre and the colonial periphery. In his celebrated work, *Orientalism* (1978), Said explains how western scholars have contributed to the making of "the other" by stereotyping the West as rational and the East as irrational. Similarly, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967), explores the subjugation of the Black self and the celebration of the White other, a fabricated European racial identity. Fanon's emphasis is on the oppression of the Black community and the metaphoric depiction of the White mask as a liberating option, but both Said and Fanon examine the construction of "the other" and the importance of language in the process of manipulating knowledge.

In the context of Queer Diaspora writing, the construction of the "other" requires a detailed analysis as the status of the "other" is determined and shaped by various factors, such as gender, race, national identity, and religion. However, in this section of the dissertation, a critique of gender and sexuality in the construction of "other" in the context of queer narratives is attempted. Queer subjects are often identified as gender deviants by mainstream society, for they remain non-conformists towards binarism in the notion of gender. However, it is not the mere categorisation in terms of gender that qualifies the queer community to be identified as an outstretch of postcolonial "other". However, the stigma associated with the term ultimately leads to the marginalisation of the community members. While narrating the young protagonist's experience in encountering his alternate sexuality, Kunal Mukherjee presents an unadorned yet profound account of the ground reality of homosexual existence.

> Homosexuality is an abnormal condition. Male homosexuals are often effeminate. Parents need to look to see if their children are teased in school for being too feminine or masculine. Boys who are homosexual like to play with dolls, hate sports and prefer quite activities to active ones. Girls who are homosexual like to play rough sports and do not play with dolls like normal girls do. Early signs of homosexuality are obsession with a friend who is of the same sex and a lack of desire and interest in the opposite sex. It is treatable by electric shock and aversion therapy. Homosexuals live on the fringe and are very unhappy people. Parents are advised to start treating this condition early in childhood (Mukherjee, 296).

Mukherjee has deliberately used gross generalisation and misrepresentation of facts to depict the psyche of mainstream society towards queer community members. Such hatred, contempt, and

disgust in the given passage reflect the liminal understanding of gender, which was questioned by queer exponent theorists like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick[6]. Binarism in the distinction between masculine and effeminate qualities is depicted in this passage through the image of boys and girls. However, this categorization does not remain harmless, as it extends to the labelling of "normal" and "abnormal", thereby subscribing to the process of othering in terms of gender and sexuality.

As heteronormativity does not uphold the idea of gender fluidity, queer community members are often forced to conceal their alternate sexuality traits, fearing public reactions. Sedgwick has used the term "closet" to describe the same in her celebrated work *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which is considered as one of the significant fundamental texts in queer theory to date. Sedgwick states that "the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (71) and "closetedness itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence —not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). Hiding one's own sexual identity from the public eye, either by choice or influence, also suggest the crippling nature of a heteronormative social structure.

Sedgwick has also introduced the term "coming out of the closet" to suggest the liberating moment in the life of a queer community member where he/ she openly embraces alternate sexual identity in the public sphere. Sedgwick's idea of coming out refers to a deliberate attempt from the queer subjects, using language as a powerful mode of expression. His emphasis on language throughout the work suggests the postcolonial manifestation of power and

[6] See Dino Felluga's "Modules on Butler: On Gender and Sex"
"Judith Butler questions the belief that certain gender behaviors are natural, illustrating the ways that one's learned performance of gendered behavior (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality" (270).

knowledge and how language becomes an empowering tool for articulating sexuality and desire. An autobiographical account of Minal Hajratwala in *Leaving India: My Family's Journey from Five Villages to Five Continents* brings out how her access to quality education becomes vital in the process of coming out. Language plays a crucial role in articulating her alternate sexual preference, especially in the academic realm.

However, coming out does not provide an ultimate solution to all the struggles that queer subjects have undergone, as mainstream society can still be prejudiced and homophobic. Sedgwick observes that;

> Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important. Nor —at the most basic level —is it unaccountable that someone who wanted a job, custody or visiting rights, insurance, protection from violence, from "therapy," from distorting stereotype, from insulting scrutiny, from simple insult, from forcible interpretation of their bodily product, could deliberately choose to remain in or to reenter the closet in some or all segments of their life. The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence (68).

The humiliation and rejection that Minal Hajratwala had to undergo, as an aftermath of her decision to confess her sexuality in front of her family, imply how mainstream social structure

associates gender minorities with the notion of deviant/ "abnormal". In Farzana Doctor's *Six Meters of Pavement,* the queer character Fatima, a 20-year-old medical student, was thrown out of her home immediately after she revealed her sexual identity. Similarly, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *The Exiles* demonstrates how an illicit homosexual relationship ends up in the tragic killing of the queer character, Atif. Thus, it can be analysed that social responses to the act of coming out are often shaped and affected by the lenses of morality and honour. An excerpt from the conversation among the gay couple, Rahul and Andrew, in *My Magical Palace* is given:

> And I also got to see for myself how society treated the parents of gay children. From that point on, I pretty much went straight back into the closet. I could not imagine bringing shame to the family
>
> … 'I don't think you have ever dealt with that kind of shame'
>
> … 'May be you're right. We have a word called *izzat* back home. I don't think there is an exact translation for that word in English. It means… personal honour—family honour, honour of one's position in society and much, much more. Without *izzat,* a man cannot leave his home and face the world. That is the level of shame I am talking about—disowning one's kids is not enough. Have you heard about honour killings?'
>
> 'When a family kills a member? Yes. That is brutal.'
>
> 'Well, that is the level of shame I am talking about. Anyway, by the time that year ended, I was completely in denial and lived in terror of losing what I had left' (321).

Despite all these hardships and consequences, the process of 'coming out of the closet' does remain a crucial point in the identity formation of a queer subject. Authors like Kunal Mukherjee

and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla have mapped out the stark reality between those who celebrate their sexuality and those who remain in the closet forever, through the characters of Colonel Uncle and Aunty Zainab respectively. Both these characters represent the societal pressure the queer community undergoes in the name of morality and shame.

2.5: Cross-dressing and Bodily Modifications: A Multi-dimensional Manifestation of Queer Subjectivity

The process of cross-dressing can be identified as one of the most important outgoing forms of expression in the discourse of queer sexuality and desire. Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough define the process of cross-dressing as follows:

> It ranges from simply wearing one or two items of clothing to a full scale burlesque, from a comic impersonation to a serious attempt to pass as the opposite gender, from an occasional desire to experiment with gender identity to attempting to live most of one's life as a member of the opposite sex (*Cross-dressing, Sex and Gender*, 7).

Cross-dressing can often be looked upon as an expression of gender fluidity and can also be seen as a mode of resistance against heteronormativity. In the process of cross-dressing, queer subjects decode and celebrate the notion of 'visibility'. According to Judith Butler, the notion of gender is inclusive of its 'citations'. While analysing the drag character Lily Savage [a fictitious female character who was portrayed on stage by a male performer/ artist] in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler observes that the identity of the character is not understood in terms of "chromosomes or hormones…the usual touchstones of biological decision", rather it is determined by various aspects like dress, make-up and hairstyle. The character's physical appearance is in accordance with feminine attributes, or the character 'cites' or 'quotes' female

traits. Butler's analysis of the identity of a drag character establishes her view on the concept of cross- dressing and how cross-dressing intersects with binarism in the notion of gender. Thus, "visibility" or coming out of "the closet" as Sedgwick terms it is often attained through the process of cross-dressing.

In the context of queer narratives, clothes acquire an essential role as it does not merely stand for the manifestation of gender fluidity; rather represent a political statement as well. In *Six Meters of Pavements, Farzana Doctor* observes the political standpoint that the queer subjects establish through their lifestyle, with the portrayal of the character, Fatima, a queer activist, and writer, who was thrown out of her highly religious family. The author introduces Fatima as a rebel who dared to publish an article titled *Beyond Bisexual: A Queer Girl's Take on LGBT* in the university magazine and thus be vocal about her alternate sexual identity in public despite the threat from her family. Fatima and her queer friends Sonia, Monica, and Ashton openly embrace their sexual identity and realize the significance of their bodies in making a political statement. Doctor's references to the process of cross-dressing, performances by drag queens, tattooing, and piercing in the description of queer community gatherings, thus, reflect how the queer subjects make use of their bodies for a mode of resistance in the mainstream.

However, the social response to cross-dressing, as presented by authors like Mehta, Mukherjee[7], Dhalla, and Doctor, reflects that homophobia or transphobia is deep rooted in the psyche of the mainstream. Mehta, in his novel *No Other World,* presents an account of the vulnerable queer subjects through the character of Kiran, who chooses not to cross-dress in public- even if he enjoys it- as he is intimidated by the societal norms. Mehta strategically presents an account of the character's internal struggle in safeguarding the honour of the family

[7] Neel Mukherjee

and embracing his alternate sexual identity in the depiction of the protagonist, as he sneaks out of the family and dresses in female attire along with his gay friends in secrecy. As the character of the cousin narrates:

> The figure he would see would be laughing with two men … and the figure he would believe was Kiran would be swathed in a gold sari- not swathed, because swathed means enveloped, swathed means cocooned, and this figure would be neither. His midriff would be bare and the sleeves of his blouse very short; there would be gold metal bands wrapped snakelike around his upper arms,… his skin was shimmering with body glitter…. He would remember the gold high heels, perilously high, and how assured the figure had seemed, how he didn't teeter but stomped. (*No Other World*, 186- 7)

The given passage from the novel is presented as a sneak peek into the process of cross-dressing through the eyes of a minor character. However, the detailed and embellished narration of the female attire that Kiran wears also reflects the suppressed desire of the subject to embrace his sexuality. Similarly, the inevitable shame and embarrassment accompanying with the process of cross-dressing, which ultimately forces the subjects to keep it a secret, is narrated through the childhood memory of the protagonist Atif in Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *The Exiles*. The whimsical dancing of a young boy to his favourite film song turns into a dark secret as the mother witnesses Atif's "femme fatale moves" accompanied by an artificial "long silken hair and the folds of a glamorous dress" (108). Atif's desire to dress up in a woman's attire is shattered, and he begins to question his sexual identity as he "saw the mirth drained from her face. It was replaced with nervousness and perturbation as if a grave realization had dawned upon her" (108). He realises the fear and embarrassment that cross-dressing can bring in a heteronormative society as he says

that “they had known instinctively that there was something taboo about what had happened and that his father had better not find out. It was the first time that he had sensed that there was something wrong with what had come naturally to him” (108).

Unlike Dhalla and Mehta, Neel Mukherjee presents another nuance of cross-dressing in his novel, *A Life Apart*. Cross-dressing and other bodily modifications such as tattooing and piercing are generally seen as a mode of resistance or/ and the celebration of the queer body. The symbolic reference of the act of cross-dressing can also be associated with the process of “coming out of the closet”. However, in some cases, cross-dressing becomes a burden and torture as the queer subject is forced to do so, against his or her will. The well-known critic and sociologist Richard Ekins observes in *Male Femaling: A Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-dressing and Sex Changing* (1997), that there are three modes of “male femaling”, viz, body femaling, erotic femaling, and gender femaling. He observes that these modes are “set within a phased femaling career path. Typical features of each phase [may indicate] oscillations between the major facets of sex, sexuality, and gender frequently confronted in each other” (2). Neel Mukherjee’s depiction of the sexual tension between the protagonist Ritwik, and the character Greg, where Ritwik is forced to cross-dress against his will, can be identified as a mode of “erotic femaling”, as Ekins has termed in which the queer body undergoes physical transformation (including the process of cross-dressing) for erotic pleasure. Erotic femaling often results from a deliberate attempt to recreate the heterosexual mode of physical intimacy. Cross-dressing is often a deliberate choice, whereas the protagonist in Mukherjee’s *A Life Apart* stands as a victim for the element of consent was in questionable state. The dialogue between Ritwik and Greg is given below:

‘OK, but tell me first what’s in the bag.’

> He brought out stilettos, a black nylon bra, transparent black panties and gripped Ritwik's hand. 'I want you to take all your clothes off, put these on and walk outside' (316).

As the conversation progresses, the readers are presented with a violent account of Ritwik being ill-treated on the street. As Greg forces Ritwik to wear the female attire and physically abuse him, Ritwik's correlation between his body and self is thrown to a toss. Thus, Mukherjee presents those symbols of feminine attire that Greg had imposed on Ritwik as the epitome of horror and shame.

At this juncture, it is essential to raise specific questions about the process and implications of cross-dressing.

- How and why female attire on a man's body or a transgender body is more vulnerable and subjected to criticism in mainstream society, and not vice versa? Could it be possible to analyse it as an extension of patriarchy?
- How does cross-dressing, knowingly or unknowingly, adhere to binarism in the notion of gender? Does it suggest reaffirmation of masculine-feminine gender roles, even among queer subjects?
- Is there an absence of negotiating the binaries by creating a new/third space in clothing? If at all gender-neutral clothes exist, to what extent is it popular?
- How does the notion of 'hyper-femininity' in cross-dressing –clothes in flashy colours, gaudy accessories, and excessive make up- affect social response?

Primarily, the practice of queer community members dressing up in female attire is subjected to criticism in mainstream society, whereas man's attire is often accepted in terms of comfort or

fashion aesthetics. Though such an observation may appear trivial from a peripheral level of analysis, it does imply the hierarchical framework of gender notion. The fact that it is female attire on a man's body, or a transgender body, which is vulnerable and subjected to society's critical gaze, indirectly suggests the problematised hierarchical structure in a queer context. The socially constructed notion of gender in binaries does have an impact on queer existence as well. Richard Ekins' usage of the term "male femaling", which refers to those "males who wish to 'female' in various ways, in various contexts, at various times, with various stagings, and with varying consequences" (2) itself suggests the hierarchical power relation between the binary genders that is embedded in the heteronormative and patriarchal social structure.

Clothing is an important marker of identity in the context of queer narratives, yet, the definition of the process of cross-dressing is limited to the extent of gay, transgender, and transsexual bodies. The wide gap in the representation of lesbian bodies (even after considering the drag kings), bisexual bodies, asexual bodies, and pansexual bodies under the broader spectrum of the queer body remain unsettled. The possibility of creating a "third-space" remains a herculean task, even at the present age, when it comes to dressing. As many of the queer subjects hail the process of cross-dressing as a mode of resistance and the celebration of the body, one cannot deny the fact that cross-dressing can be looked upon as a reaffirmation of masculine- feminine gender norms by leaving out a gender fluid clothing option to the queer community. Interestingly, even in this cosmopolitan age, the popularity and reach of gender-neutral clothing options remain a vague possibility. On the other hand, apart from the process of cross-dressing, other bodily modifications among queer community members have achieved a gender-neutral status to a great extent. As Victoria Pitts opines:

> Queer body modification is a site for investigating the possibilities and limitations of agency in body practices … By creating anomalous bodies that provoke shock and consternation, body modifiers not only underscore the body's symbolic significance as a site of public identity but also conceive it as a resource for opposing (hetero) dominant culture.…Preceded by the longer history of tattoos in the West, and accompanied by a renaissance in their popularity, the last three decades have seen a rise in the invention, revival, appropriation, and deployment of other body technologies, such as scarification, branding, binding, subdermal implants, and earlobe stretching. Many of these are highly stigmatized, 'neotribal' practices modeled after the rituals of non-Western indigenous groups… A number of body technologies, including branding, genital piercing, scarification, corsetry, have gained popularity in gay and lesbian SM and fetish subcultures in recent years. … The rise and spread of these practices reflect the emergence of body modification as a cultural movement ("Visibly Queer", 443-4).

The aspect of "hyper-femininity" in the process of cross-dressing is yet another concept which needs to be analysed in detail. Clothes in flashy colours, gaudy ornaments and excessive make up attribute the clichéic image of queer community members as perceived by the mainstream heteronormative society. The significance of such a peculiar way of dressing and its impact on the social response to cross-dressing is examined in detail through the depiction of the character Pooja, a *hijra*, as presented by Rahul Mehta in *No Other World*. In sociology, hyper-femininity is characterised as a negative attribute. Melannie Matschiner and Sarah K. Murnen, in their article titled "Hyper-femininity and Influence" observe that:

> Murnen and Byrne (1991) have defined hyper-femininity as an exaggerated adherence to a feminine gender role as it relates to heterosexual relationships. Hyper feminine women believe their success is determined by maintaining a romantic relationship with a man, and that their sexuality can be used to maintain this relationship… hyper feminine attitudes was found to be related to agreement with ideas that reflect support for a traditional-and sometimes subordinate-societal position for women. For example, hyper feminine women reported negative attitudes toward women, were more likely to endorse a traditional family ideology, were more likely to express that marriage is more important than a career, and to report the belief that it is important for a spouse to have an economically successful, prestigious job… Hyper feminine women advocated less harsh reactions to sexual-aggression scenarios and more self blame if they were themselves the victims of sexual aggression…The portrayal of women as sexual objects, which is part of the hyper feminine response pattern, is consistent with images of women found in mainstream advertising, fiction, and popular music (631-2).

In the context of queer writing, cross-dressing is often looked upon as an extension of hyper-femininity. Rahul Mehta's depiction of the *hijra* character in *No Other World* explores the possibilities of the queer body at multiple levels. The term *hijra* can be translated to English as hermaphrodite or eunuch. Though the term has traditionally been associated with a derogatory status in mainstream society, *hijras* have reclaimed the term. "Some *hijras* were biological hermaphrodites, but most were castrated men. They were considered neither male, nor female but were recognized as a third gender" (Mehta, 194). Mehta further examines the significance of

hijras in Hindu mythology. He explores how their presence is considered as auspicious during various occasions in Indian culture. He elaborated that "they were beings, devotees of the goddess Bahuchara Mata. For centuries they had occupied a place of respect and power- many people believed *hijras* had the power to bless or curse, especially when it came to fertility and childbirth- but were now mostly prostitutes and beggars" (Mehta,194).

Citing a childhood memory of the protagonist, in which the performance of a *hijra* on the silver screen was ridiculed upon, the author draws the stark reality of hardships that the community members regularly undergo. Hailing from a lower-class family with deplorable living conditions, Prakash leaves his home at the age of ten and, thus, begins his journey of transformation. As he is offered a shelter under the comforting presence of Guru Ma, the community head, Prakash begins to embrace the effeminate qualities he was forced to hide as a sinful secret and accepts a new name and identity, Pooja. Despite all the struggles of living as a "gender deviant" in Indian society, Pooja was content with her decision to embrace her true self. Interestingly, the protagonist's interaction with Pooja encourages him to "come out of the closet" and reveal his sexuality to the world as he realises that "premise [could be] wrong…the binary itself was false, duality an illusion. Perhaps the true self was always in flux, always in between. Perhaps the true self was like the hologram, simultaneously both and neither" (216). This epiphanic moment where the protagonist comes in terms with his body, sexuality and desire by deciphering the essence of gender fluidity reflects the artistic craftsmanship of the author as well.

Mehta comments on the obsessive admiration of the *hijra* community towards Princess Diana and Diana Hayden [Miss India winner, 1997], in order to examine the role of the queer community members in reasserting binarism in gender roles and the notion of hyper-femininity. Princess Diana and Diana Hayden are presented as the epitome of feminine elegance, beauty, and

power that the community was constantly striving for. Guru Ma's act of framing the portrait of Diana to be kept with the Gods and idols that they worship, symbolically suggests how binarism in gender norms is normalised among the third gender. However, the act of cross-dressing or wearing flashy saris, gaudy ornaments, and heavy makeup specifically in the case of *hijras,* as presented by Rahul Mehta, does make a political statement by embracing their alternate sexuality in public. As Guru Ma claimed, "We [*hijras*] are special, we are *magic*" (236).

However, the mainstream social response towards the *hijra* community, as presented by Mehta, represents the marginalisation of gender minorities in the Indian subcontinent, even in the cosmopolitan era. The way how Pooja was ill treated by the extended family members of the protagonist was an outcome of the stereotypes instilled in the psyche of mainstream consciousness towards the downtrodden communities. The acts of cross-dressing and other bodily modifications are subjected to the scrutiny of the public and contributed much to the process of "othering". And as the gender minorities like *hijras* are deprived of equal opportunities or financial assistance, many of the subjects like Pooja are often forced into prostitution against their will. Despite all these struggles, as Mehta states, "in her old life as Prakash, she had learned the art of silence, of disappearance… Surely all of the girls, in their old lives, had learned the same art. But they had forgotten. In their new lives, they'd had to cultivate something different: dancing, singing, clapping, performing. To be hijra was to be- finally!- heard" (235), and flashy clothes, gaudy ornaments, and makeup act as powerful tools in making the statement on the existence of minority genders. Thus, it can be concluded that the body, in the context of queer narratives, can be identified not only as a platform for the manifestation of sexuality and desire but also as a powerful tool in establishing a political statement as a mode of resistance.

2.6: Migrant body

The construction of the "other" in the context of queer diaspora writing is an outcome of the amalgamation of various elements in the process of identity formation. Race, nationality, religious beliefs, language, etc, are primary factors in defining the identity of a migrant body in any foreign land. According to Andrew C. Okolie:

> Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the "other." So, by defining itself a group defines *others.* Identity is rarely claimed or assigned for its own sake. These definitions of self and others have purposes and consequences… There is usually an expectation of gain or loss as a consequence of identity claims. This is why identities are contested. Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both *self* and the *other,* the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities. (2)

As queer diaspora writing falls under the broader spectrum of postcolonial studies, the notion of "self and other" is irreplaceable in understanding the marginalisation process. "Othering" in the context of queer diaspora narratives refers to the construction of an ever evolving migrant identity, which is shaped and affected by various factors like race, nationality, and gender. The concept of *intersectionality* as perceived by the well-known African feminist critic Kimberle Crenshaw suggests the role of each of these elements in the process of identity formation. As a feminist critic, Crenshaw questioned the relevance of traditional feminist theories concerning the exclusion of black women. She argued that the discrimination against black women must be considered with particular emphasis to the overlapping nature of race and gender along with

other apparatuses like economic class, unlike the western feminist counterpart. As she observes, "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take *intersectionality* into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (140). Similarly, the representation of migrant bodies in the context of queer narratives will remain incomplete without having a holistic approach considering the intersection of the notion of gender fluidity with all other elements, which further influence the process of assimilation and identity formation.

Recent studies in the field of queer migration explore how the migration pattern changes over time. Critics like Martin F. Manalansan, Nicola Mai, Russell King, Hector Carrillo, and Andrew Gorman-Murray have commented on the shift in the purpose behind migration. Their studies show a significant change in migration format, as sexuality becomes a decisive factor in the migration process, rather than financial security, better living conditions and employment opportunities, especially from third-world countries to western nations. Though the political tensions behind the large-scale refugee migration in the 21st century cannot be ignored, these critics emphasise the significance of sexuality in the process of migration in the cosmopolitan era by tracing out the present trend on an individual level. In his article titled "Rethinking queer migration through the body", Andrew Gorman-Murray suggests that:

> We need to 'downsize' the scale of explanation from the regional or the national to the body. In doing this, we need to keep our sights on sexuality itself as a key motivating factor, which should enable us to recognize diverse paths of migration without privileging one trajectory at the expense of others. To this end, I propose that queer migration should be understood as an embodied search for sexual

> identity—an individual search which can be materialized at differing, multiple scales and paths of relocation (111).

The character of Atif in Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *The Exiles* and Ritwik in Neel Mukherjee's *A Life Apart* can be looked upon as examples of migrant bodies whose sexuality became the critical factor that instigated them to cross geographical boundaries. Similarly, the protagonist Rahul in Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace* is presented as the personification of the internal conflict in an immigrant towards his tradition, culture, moral belief, and family values with his alternate sexuality. For these three characters, migrations act as a way out from their respective homophobic social structures. Both Kunal Mukherjee and Dhalla have strategically employed a subplot by introducing the foil through the characters of Colonel Uncle and Aunt Zainab, respectively, in order to suggest how the minority genders are forced to constrain their homosexual instincts from the public eye in search of social acceptance and family honour in the Indian subcontinent. Thus, migration is presented as an escape mechanism through which the characters are introduced to a comparatively liberal lifestyle in terms of sexuality. As Murray observes;

> There is a key relationship here between displacement and queer identities: queer migrant subjects move out in order to come out (Fortier 2001). In other words, migration is often informed by a yearning to discover, explore and enact sexual identities and desires…. Psychically, the quest is a search for wholeness, for physical, emotional and ontological security amidst a heterosexist world that disciplines (and often oppresses) queer identities and behaviours (111-112).

However, the economic status or the social class to which these queer subjects/ characters belong requires a particular emphasis in this context, as the process of migration is influenced by the

same. The existence of a migrant body and the process of displacement and/or assimilation are highly influenced by the financial security of the subjects. Hailing from lower middle-class Indian families, Atif and Ritwik lead very deplorable migrant lives in the initial years of their stay in foreign lands. The crumbling apartments they live in reflect the vulnerable existence of economically backward immigrants. Atif works as a salesman in a bookstore and struggles to make ends meet with the minimum wages that he receives every month. Ritwik, on the other hand, is thrown out of his apartment as his student visa expires and is forced to live in the streets. Through the character of Ritwik, Mukherjee narrates the exploitation in the illegal labour markets in the West. Mukherjee provides a detailed account of how the illegal immigrants and refugees were assembled at the crossroads in the early mornings in search of their daily bread. They were separated into different groups based on their physical strength and linguistic skills by the black market agents/ intermediaries and taken into different locations. Ritwik encounters the stark reality of immigrant existence in these illegal black markets. He realises that he was accepted or rejected on his body's "bodiness" or physical attributes, as he was rejected over African and Caribbean muscular immigrant bodies and preferred over slender illegal female bodies from the Middle East.

Furthermore, racial and linguistic superiority was evident among the refugees and illegal immigrants. Mukherjee points out the role of race, gender, nationality, and languages in the process of marginalisation and discrimination in the context of diaspora through the realistic account of illegal job markets. As the legal administrative bodies trapped the black-market agents, Ritwik was even forced into prostitution. Later, his economic status began showing a slight improvement, as he was hired as a caretaker to an elderly British woman, Anne Camerone, with deteriorating health. Unlike Atif and Ritwik, Kunal Mukherjee's Rahul experiences

diaspora as a gaining process, given the benefit of his education and stable financial status. Migration becomes an opportunity for him to explore and embrace his sexuality as he comes out of the closet with his partner Andrew.

Similarly, writers like Rahul Mehta, Farzana Doctor, and Minal Hajratwala have explored the role of the class by depicting second-generation migrant bodies of alternate sexuality in their works. The process of assimilation among second-generation migrants is much more simplified, unlike their predecessors or first-generation immigrant parents, as most of them come to terms with their hybrid identities in multicultural environments. Though one cannot generalise such a thought/ statement, this trend and shift in the representation of early migrant experiences and second-generation immigrant sensibility are evident in the works of well-known Indian diaspora writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and M. G. Vassanji.etc. The notion of homeland, nostalgia, a sense of belonging, and the idea of displacement are reflected in the works of first and younger generations of diaspora writers. Rahul Mehta's characterization of Kiran in *No Other World*, Farzana Doctor's characterisation of Nasreen in *Stealing Nasreen* and Fatima in *Six Meters of Pavement*, and Minal Hajratwala's autobiographical account of a queer migrant body in *Leaving India* represent a common trait in terms of social class that they belong to. All these migrant bodies, being second-generation migrants, are benefited from the outcome of their parents' struggle in the process of assimilation. Kiran, Nasreen, Fatima, and Hajratwala are exposed to the privileges of western education and economic independence, as they belong to upper-middle-class families. However, the identity of an immigrant, especially those who belong to the minority genders, was not free from the scrutiny of the mainstream heterosexual social structure. The process of "othering" in the context of queer diaspora writing, thus, can be seen as having a

multidimensional pattern. At this juncture, the significance of markers of identity that project the queer migrant body in the mainstream requires a detailed analysis.

Olivia Sheringham, in her analysis of identities in the socio-cultural context of Martinique titled "Markers of Identity in Martinique: Being French, Black, Creole", categorises markers into three major groups, viz; environmental, social, and Creole markers. Joanna Story and Iain Walker elaborate the same as follows:

> ...environmental markers, referring almost literally to physical markers, to how external influences have made their mark on the Martinican landscape; social markers, referring to the ways in which identity is marked by the social practices and values, and particularly of mobile (migrant? Diasporic?) individuals who move between France and Martinique; and cultural markers, referring to the linguistic and cultural practices that marked Martinican (Creole) identity (139).

In a multicultural environment, everyone is identified by such markers of identity. The "visibility" of an immigrant in a foreign land is directly correlated with the projection of such markers. A comprehensive study of the history of Indian diaspora writing can reflect the writers' deliberate attempt to manifest Indianness through nostalgia. Revival of the past and homeland in diaspora writing is achieved not just through the depiction of memory, but by incorporating indigenous markers into immigrant sensibility. Critics Joanna Story and Iain Walker observe that "marking out the social boundaries of ethnic groups is part of the process of constituting a diaspora, and the maintenance of ties to the homeland (a crucial part of the definition) requires the reproduction of markers that allow … diaspora to assert their claims (140)".

Cultural markers like names, food habits, languages and clothing styles determine the formation of identity of the diaspora subjects, be they the first-generation immigrants or their

successors. Though it cannot be generalised, as immigrants from different age groups and socio-political backgrounds react differently to the values of their homeland, the immigrants remain as the 'other' in the foreign lands in varying aspects. Despite their attempt to fit into mainstream society, markers of identity that define their respective race, religion, or nationality influence the existence of migrant bodies. An excerpt from Neel Mukherjee's *A Life Apart* that suggests the mode of discrimination on racial grounds is given below:

> Ritwik also realizes, in slow stages, that his is a type of minority appeal, catering to the 'special interest' group rather than the mainstream, because of his nationality, looks, skin colour. He keeps pushing the word 'race' away. The mainstream is blonde, white, young, slim. Or, more accurately, that is the desired mainstream (124).

At this point in the plot, Ritwik is forced into prostitution, primarily to escape poverty, and secondly, as he is desperate to explore his sexuality and desire, which has been suppressed for years. Still, he failed to find out a meaningful relationship. However, this phase in Ritwik's life, as depicted by Neel Mukherjee, brings out an important nuance of the migrant body, where race and gender intersect. The paradox in the all-inclusive nature of the cosmopolitan era is exposed as Mukherjee makes a sarcastic statement that "this world [Mukherjee refers to the gay flesh market here] divides into two classes: the rice queens—men who fancy Oriental guys—and the potato queens—men who have a thing for white British men" (124), and suggests the undeniable racial segregation in the present era. Avtar Brah examines the complex association between gender and race in the context of the diaspora in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities.* Brah opines:

> Desire for the racialised 'Other' is constructed and codified in and through patriarchal regimes of power, even as heterosexual cultural norms, values and conventions are continually disrupted by lesbian, gay, and other sexualities. At the same time all sexualities in a racialised context are inscribed by racialised matrices of power. In other words the 'Other' of racism is not an unequivocal obverse of 'self'; 'otherness' maybe constructed primarily, but not exclusively, in antithetical terms. Moreover, racial and sexual otherness are intimately connected, the one is imminent in the other (155).

Queer bodies, thus, can be identified as the victims of double alienation, for the 'otherness' in their existence is determined by gender and race. As Minal Hajratwala states "that … [her] alienation had a racial component… I had thought that I was an outcast because I had wrong clothes, or the wrong karma… almost everyone I saw was white, I never thought myself as not-white. I felt different, but I did not know why" (313). Hajratwala explains how miserably she failed in her attempt to be "normal". Drawing upon the metaphor of the "Melting Pot", she contemplates her inability to "blend" towards being an ideal American immigrant. Race and sexuality, as Minal explored, remain two major factors that affect the process of assimilation, and determine the process of "othering" of the migrant bodies.

Racialisation in the context of migrant narratives can also have subtle or symbolic modes of manifestations, unlike the direct attack on "brown bodies". According to Avtar Brah, "if a phenomenon is to be identified as racism, the collectivity signified within it must be represented as being 'inherently different'. Contrary to positions which construct racism as a transparent technology of suppression and oppression, processes of racialisation do not always occur in the matrix of simple bipolarities of… superiority and inferiority, or inclusion and exclusion (155)."

The emphasis on land division in Mehta's *No Other World*, Doctor's *Six Meters of Pavement* and Hajratwala's *Leaving India* also suggests subtle forms of racial discrimination. "The newer houses were farther downhill where Kiran lived, in the small subdivisions that pooled off Sherman Road" whereas the white men lived "midway up the hill... an A- frame" with better connectivity (Mehta, 2). The protagonist Ismail in *Six Meters of Pavement* (2011), who has lived in an immigrant ghetto for decades, never witnessed a white family moving into the area. "Ismail and Rehna bought the Lochrie Street house in Little Portugal as a starter home... Over the following eighteen years, the neighbourhood shifted a little, taking on new tones and shades with each decade. Ismail watched the Portuguese kids grow up and move to the suburbs... He witnessed the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants move in, co-mingling with their Old World European neighbours in uneasy and unfamiliar ways" (15), but never an American family. Similarly, Minal Hajratwala observes the "subdivisions" of territory and she states that "Michigan's racial structure was densely layered, built not only around our hearts but into our landscape. I have come to understand that the uniformity I witnessed around me was not imagined but constructed: a landscape shaped by successive waves of racism (313)".

In addition to race, religion is another critical factor that determines and shapes the existence of migrant bodies in foreign lands. Writers like Rahul Mehta, Farzana Doctor, and Minal Hajratwala have commented on the growing trend of Islamophobia in post-9/11 America. Aziz, a Muslim classmate of Bharat in *No Other World,* is an example of the same who was a victim of constant bullying by his American counterparts in school. Mehta also introduces the character of Preeti, who converts to Christianity as she distances herself from the superstitions imposed by her immigrant parents. Preeti's baptism, which she describes as being "born again" with the "touch that heals and…makes you whole" (154), and her decision to marry an American

did have an impact on the process of assimilation. Religion, for Preeti, acted as a factor that negotiated her immigrant sensibility. The transition/ conversion from Hinduism to Christianity helped her smoothen the process of assimilation. Hajratwala also shares her bitter memories of bullying in school and neighbourhood because of her religious belief in *Leaving India*. Both Mehta and Hajratwala emphasised the role of religion in discriminating against migrant bodies and labelling them as "outsiders" and "others".

On the other hand, Farzana Doctor focuses on the intervention of religion and alternate sexuality. Doctor's characterisation of Fatima in *Six Meters of Pavement* signifies the conflict between religion and gender fluidity. As Fatima reveals her bisexual identity to her parents, she is thrown out of the family. The idea of gender fluidity and queerness contradicted with the moral codes of her conservative parents, and "they accused [her] of publicly shaming them" (169). She was constantly living under the fear of scandalising her family with the truth regarding her sexuality. The notion of 'self' is highly problamatised in this context, as she realises that "keeping up appearances is very important… it can mean losing your community if you don't (180)". Religion and sexuality remained two extremely contradicting ideologies to Fatima as the notion of "sin" contradicted with her sexual freedom, thus, forcing her to choose her alternate sexuality over religion.

Therefore, it can be summarised that the representation of the queer body, with reference to the select works of Rahul Mehta, Kunal Mukherjee, Neel Mukherjee, Farzana Doctor, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, and Minal Hajratwala spanning from early childhood to the process of migration reflects multiple modes of negotiations with mainstream ideologies. As the notion of "other" is embarked upon the queer body, this chapter is attempted to examine different layers of identity formation. The depiction of the queer body, as presented by the select writers, signifies the

exclusion of minority genders in its encounter with heteronormativity and patriarchy. The role of parental intervention and social institutions like family and school in shaping and reaffirming binarism in gender norms is discussed in detail. Followed by Lee Edelman's theoretical construction of the figure of "the child", the interrelation between the formation of sexual identity and childhood has been established. Homophobic instances from the texts have been used to elaborate on Sedgwick's idea of "the formation of the closet" and "coming out" through the analysis of the queer body's interactions with homosexual and heterosexual counterparts. A detailed analysis of cross- dressing and other bodily modifications is also attempted in this chapter by emphasising to the idea of male femaling proposed by Richard Ekins. The notion of hyper-femininity with reference to the *hijra* community in the Indian subcontinent is also examined in order to understand various nuances of the process of cross-dressing, which can be looked upon as the celebration of sexuality and/or as a mode of resistance by making a powerful political statement to ensure "visibility" in the public spaces. The last section of this chapter titled migrant bodies, analyses the role of various factors like race, class, and religion in the process of identity formation in the context of migration narratives with reference to the idea of *intersectionality* as perceived by the well-known African feminist critic Kimberle Crenshaw. Thus, this chapter has a holistic approach to the representation of the queer body, with reference to the select queer diaspora texts, and has attempted to locate the queer body in the postcolonial framework of the notion of the "Other".

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Chapter 3

Queer Diasporic Trauma: An analysis of Memory, Dreams, and Symbols as Literary Devices

3.1: An Introduction to Trauma Theory and Queer Subjectivity

Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (2004) was a pioneering work that contextualized queer trauma in the theoretical discourse of trauma studies. Cvetkovich borrowed feminist, Marxist, and sexuality theories to construct the notion of queer trauma. With reference to select literary and visual queer performances, Cvetkovich established queer trauma as a cultural construct shaped and influenced by personal and cultural histories. Cvetkovich opined that any form of queer representation is significant in theorizing queer trauma for "Queer performance creates publics by bringing together live bodies in space, and the theatrical experience is not just about what's on stage but also about who's in the audience creating community" (9). Her analysis could draw a vivid theoretical distinction between cultural trauma and the concept of trauma perceived by clinical psychology regarding the medical history of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Cvetkovich identifies that "Sexual acts, butch-femme discourse, queer transnational publics, incest, aids and aids activism, grassroots archives—these are some of the sites of lesbian public culture" (3). She probes into the political and cultural aspects of trauma associated with gender fluidity. However, Cvetkovich establishes that the meaning of trauma cannot be restricted to the pathological findings by medical experts. Further, she examines the limitations of therapeutical measures and solution based approach to trauma studies. She emphasises on the

significance of socio-political contexts in understanding the nuances of trauma. According to Cvetkovich; “I am instead interested in how these lesbian sites give rise to different ways of thinking about trauma and in particular to a sense of trauma as connected to the textures of everyday experience. Moreover, in focusing on cultural responses to trauma” (4).

Cvetkovich’s emphasis on the lived experiences of trauma and the social response towards trauma act as foundational arguments in this chapter. The chapter outlines the representation of queer trauma in select narratives. Similarly, Michelle Balaev is another important figure who explored various nuances of literary trauma theory. He proposed the idea of an intergenerational theory of trauma and memory to suggest how individual trauma can be passed on to cultural apparatuses and vice versa. Balaev emphasised the significance of race, gender, and ethnicity in embodying trauma in identity formation. Unlike Cvetkovich, Balaev’s work was aimed at a comprehensive analysis of literary trauma theory. Balaev observed that “The concept of trauma as timeless, repetitious, and infectious supports a literary theory of trans-historical trauma by making a parallel causal relationship between the individual and group, as well as between traumatic experience and pathologic responses” (152).

Balaev’s theory signifies the timelessness of historical trauma. He argues that historical trauma can be passed on to individuals as an individual identifies himself as a part of a community. It can be based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and/or any other cultural attributes. Balaev’s observations on the significance of traumatic shared memory are reflected in various historical events like Partition, Indian independence movement, Civil Rights Movement, apartheid, Persecution of Jews in Hitler’s Germany, and so on. Balaev asserts that one need not experience a traumatic event in real life, rather, can be affected with the shared memory of persecution and marginalisation. Historical instances of racial discrimination against

certain communities in the context of diaspora can also be studied under Balaev's theoretical rubric. Balaev argues that "historical traumatic experience is the source that marks and defines contemporary individual identity, as well as racial or cultural identity" (152). Therefore, Cvetkovich and Balaev remain relevant in the context of trauma in queer diasporic narratives, as the former locates trauma in queer public culture. At the same time, the latter emphasises the intersection of socio-cultural apparatuses. However, both Cvetkovich and Balaev have agreed upon the interrelation between personal and cultural memory.

The study indicates that the representation of memory and the element of nostalgia take a different mode of manifestation in queer diaspora from the conventional depiction of diaspora literature. The nostalgic revival of the past is an effective tool that most diaspora writers experiment to portray immigrant sensibility. Cultural shock, nostalgia, alienation, in-betweenness, and discrimination on racial grounds are a few of the aspects that ultimately lead to an identity crisis and existential trauma in the context of diaspora writing. The valorisation of Indianness in diaspora writing results from an immigrant subject's continuous dialogue with cultural memory. An immigrant may identify himself/herself with the larger discourse of their indigenous culture and document it in literature. Spanish critic Beatriz Perez Zapata in her article "Decolonizing Trauma: A Study of Multidirectional Memory in Zadie Smith's *The Embassy of Cambodia*" observes that the diaspora community members inherit historical trauma in the foreign lands for being an outsider. Zapata observes how the early migrant settlers often pass on a sense of alienation to their next generations as they try to re-live the past.

The idea of cultural memory is highly debatable in the context of diaspora writing. Writers like Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul, and Raja Rao are often criticised for twisting historical and political facts in their attempt to valorise the homeland and appease the system of

the host land. Despite such a general accusation by critics on diaspora writers, the role of these writers in bringing the indigenous cultures to the mainstream literary canon needs to be addressed. However, most diaspora writers adhere to the portrayal of shared past in order to manifest Indianness.

Queer diaspora writers, on the other hand, remain an aberration to the conventional understanding of cultural memory and the idea of original or inherent trauma. There is a clear negation of the valorisation of Indianness and depiction of the shared past in contemporary queer diaspora writing. Furthermore, the writers highlight individual memory in the form of personal narratives. The trauma of being an outsider remains one of the central characteristics that the queer writers project, but with a different orientation. Unlike early diaspora writers who emphasised cultural or national identity, queer writers are focused on depicting dilemmas associated with their gender fluidity. Many queer writers selected for the study look upon migration as an escape from their homophobic homes in the East, especially in the first sections of the plots. They envision a geographical shift as an escape mechanism as the subjects are physically located in homophobic/ transphobic societies. However, race and ethnicity play a significant role in the process of othering in the host lands, adding a different nuance to the experiences of queer diasporic trauma.

It is essential to explore the depiction of the sense of belonging that the queer subjects are searching for at this juncture. Unfortunately, a melancholic tone is often reflected in queer writing as evidence of constant psychological alienation. An escape from the moral codes of the East alone is insufficient in inculcating a sense of belonging among queer immigrants. It is often evident that they are treated differently by mainstream society while analysing the social acceptance of those subjects. They are often forced to restrict themselves to gender community

spaces. Distancing themselves from their fellow immigrants is one of the typical traits evident in the select narratives of this study, as the "Little Indias" remain a miniature of the homophobic Indian society geographically located in the West. Rahul Mehta's protagonist Kiran in *No Other World* keeps a deliberate distance from his fellow Indian classmates. His self-imposed alienation has not resulted from hatred towards his parental race, but rather the misconceptions and prejudice against homosexuality that those students inherited from their moral teachings of the homeland. Thus, alienation and discrimination among queer subjects occur mainly on gender and sexual grounds. The festivals and customs the immigrants celebrate with utmost enthusiasm are replaced by parties and gatherings in clubs, bars, etc, in the select narratives. Thus, it can be noted that the conventional notion of diasporic trauma is redefined in queer writing. The nostalgic revival of past and homeland is replaced by gender discrimination and an effort for social acceptance by queer diaspora writers. This distinction is evident in the characterisation of first-generation immigrant parents and their assimilated queer children, as depicted by writers like Minal Hajratwala, Farzana Doctor, and Rahul Mehta. Therefore, the act of remembering as experienced by two different generations with different value systems regarding sexual orientations reflects drastic differences. The primary source of trauma can vary from diasporic sensibility to queer subjectivity. However, contemporary queer writers do not completely ignore the element of diasporic reality in their depiction of trauma. Instead, they present diaspora as an element that compliments and exacerbates their sexuality. Therefore, the notion of trauma experienced by queer immigrants is depicted as a trait that adversely affects the process of "othering".

A study conducted by Amy E Ellis on trauma psychology, published by American Psychological Association (APA), has identified the following as "major reasons behind the

increase in hate crimes, suicides, and post-traumatic stress disorder among LGBTQ community members.

- Family rejection
- Bullying in school
- Unemployment or homelessness
- Body dysphoria
- Religious rejection
- Historical trauma[8]

APA report reveals that "families who place pressure on their children to conform to heteronormative gender expectations, resulted in children were more [8 times] as likely to attempt suicide, [six times] as likely to report high levels of depression, [3 times] as likely to use drugs, and [3 times] as likely to be at risk for HIV and STDs" (APA Report, n.p). The report emphasises the significance of awareness and impact of childhood trauma among LGBTQ community members.

The trauma spectrum in queer narratives can be broadly classified into two categories, i.e., psychological distress and bodily trauma. As the names indicate, psychological distress can be identified as an outcome of bullying, rejection, alienation, and "othering". On the other hand, bodily trauma mainly refers to the physical pain the subjects undergo after sex reassignment surgeries. The surgical procedure of vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, breast augmentation, silicon implants, hair transplants, and hormone treatments can often cause long-term or short-term physical discomfort. Bodily trauma or the physical pain inflicted from various surgical

[8] "Historical trauma relates to massive group traumas that an individual is exposed to over the lifespan and across generations" (sourced from APA Report by Amy E Ellis)

procedures, also leads to psychological distress. Unscientific and unregulated practices of castration among *hijra* community members in the urban spaces of the Indian subcontinent can be looked upon as a mechanism that inflicts and affects the notion of bodily trauma. The attack on the body's agency in the form of physical violence and sexual abuse can result in long-lasting psychological distress and trauma. For instance, Rahul Mehta in *No Other World* presents a detailed account of sexual abuse in childhood that causes both bodily and psychological trauma with reference to the characters of Kiran, Preeti, and Shawn. Hence, this chapter focuses mainly on psychological trauma represented by contemporary queer diaspora writers.

Stigmas and taboos surfaced as a manifestation of homophobia for the heterosexual social discourse intersects with the alternate sexuality models. The formation of queer trauma can be looked upon as a long-term process, which begins with the confusion within the subject as he/she realises that they are different from their peer group in terms of desire and sexuality. According to the APA report, psychological trauma takes shape when the subjects are forced to live in denial and conceal it from the public. Further, the attempts to suppress their sexuality can also reflect long term unresolved conflict and trauma. The recurrent references to the fear of humiliation involved in the process of coming out in queer narratives reveal the psychological distress among the subjects. Though the subjects begin to embrace their sexuality in public, mainstream homophobia often reminds them that they are different. As the queer subjects traverse geographical boundaries, other aspects determine identity formation, such as race, ethnicity, and nationality, that further intersects with the process of "othering" in queer public culture.

Another important aspect of trauma in the context of queer diaspora narratives is how the people around the queer subjects are affected by the expressions of queerness. The immediate

family members of the queer subjects are often subjected to social scrutiny as queerness or homosexuality deconstructs the traditional notion of socio-cultural institutions like family, marriage, and religion. Family honour, pride, goodwill, and moral values sometimes prevent parents from understanding and accepting queer subjectivity. Therefore, the exploration of queer trauma remains incomplete without examining the trauma experienced by immediate family members. For instance, an analysis of trauma in *The Exiles* must address the lived experiences of Pooja (the protagonist's wife), as her husband's proclamation of homosexuality jeopardizes her marriage. Pooja is subjected to victimisation for her role as a wife and mother she gets tarnished by Rahul's acceptance of his sexual identity.

Understanding queer temporality is essential in analysing trauma in queer diaspora narratives. In his essay "Trauma Time: The Queer Temporalities of the Traumatized Mind", critic Clementine Morrigan states that;

> There is something very queer about the way I experience time. As a person living with complex trauma, I do not experience time as a straightforward, orderly procession from the past, through the present, to the future. The past rushes up on me with the urgency of the present. The future creeps out of crevices, leaking into the now. The future and past are intimately entwined; the present produced in their merging…Sections of time are uprooted and relocated into different chapters of my life. The present is disconnected, disoriented, unmapped (50).

Morrigan's emphasis on the fusion of past and present in the context of queer trauma reconceptualises temporality. In addition, Morrigan introduces the idea of "curative time". He opines that homosexuality is often looked upon as a physical and psychological abnormality. Therefore, queer subjects are often forced into clinical therapy and other medical aids to recover

from the condition. Referring to Kafer, a feminist-queer critic, Morrigan observes that "Curative time refers to the way that experiences of disability are temporally framed in relation to a future, potential cure." (56). Curative time is analogous to the celebrated Jungian psychoanalytical model called "the bridge", which signifies the transformation or healing process. The notion of curative time is significant in the context of queer diaspora narratives, with a shift in focus from the misrepresentation of homosexuality as an abnormal condition to the concept of healing in the study of trauma.

Memory, symbols, and dreams are the three major literary devices that the writers have employed to represent and explore the concept of trauma in select narratives. Trauma is depicted as the byproduct of the postcolonial binary of self and other, the process of otherisation, and survival mechanisms. The question of identity in the context of queer diaspora narratives reflects the lived experiences that constitute the notion of trauma. This chapter additionally focuses on the representation of memory, dreams, and symbols in portraying personal and cultural/historical trauma. As stated earlier, a combination of alternate sexuality and diasporic sensibility in the select narratives signifies the fusion of temporal framework. This chapter recontextualises psychological trauma by exploring the trauma that the subjects carry forward from their respective past experiences and the trauma that they experience as a part of their lived reality. Therefore, this chapter attempts to analyse the trauma associated with past and present, homeland and host land, being in the closet and coming out, and self and others by exploring memory, dreams, and symbols as literary devices.

3.2: Representation of the Memory through Transnational- Queer Lenses

The representation of memory in the context of queer diasporic narratives is significant aspect through which the authors communicate the theme of trauma. The identity of a queer immigrant subject can be identified as an outcome of an intersection between personal and cultural memory. The study indicates that identity can be an amalgamation of both personal and cultural memory. Furthermore, memory constituted by various factors like nationality, race, religious beliefs, sexuality, socio-economic condition, and other cultural apparatuses can affect personal history and shared history. As critics Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed suggest:

> Cultural identities depend crucially on memory, collective as well as personal. The cultural critic Stuart Hall goes so far as to define identitiesas "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past". Hall's formulation stresses the mutable, reciprocal nature of identity as a constant negotiation of memory closer to what some theorists call "identifications" than to notions of identity as essentialized and static (2).

They further examine the role of "gay memory" in establishing "not only our knowledge of the past, but our ability to imagine, reshape, and make claims for identifications in the present and future as well" (2). They proceed to critically examine the "homophobic assaults on gay memory" concerning visual representations like films and sitcoms. Misrepresentations of gay characters or tarnishing of the queer community are often normalised for comic effect. Such misrepresentations do affect the popular imagination about queer subjectivity. This section of the research is aimed at a detailed study of the politics of memory with reference to the queer

diaspora. The writers focus on personal memory in the select narratives, which can be treated as important archives in documenting queer history. Along with the readings of select queer diasporic texts, the role of literature in contributing to queer history and shared memory is also addressed in detail.

While defining the notion of memory in *Queer Politics of Memory: Undisciplined Sexualities as Glimpses and Fragments in Finnish and Estonian Pasts* (2018), Riikka Taavetti observes that "Memory is inherently anachronistic, present simultaneously in multiple temporalities. Memory is not only connected to the time remembered and the time of remembering, but it also contains layers of reflections on previous times (42)". Taavetti approaches "memory as a social, political and cultural phenomenon" in order "to avoid the dangers of overusing the psychological metaphors of memory (43). Similarly, a socio-cultural framework of the representation of memory is focused in this study.

Minal Hajratwala's *Leaving India* is an autobiographical account of her family's diasporic history. She documents the history of her migration over the lifetime of five generations, beginning from Fiji, and moving into South Africa, the United Kingdom, Canada, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. She explores the experience of a brown bisexual immigrant child in the US. The text celebrates the notion of "remembering" in the diasporic context. She pays regular visits to the ancestors' homeland in her attempt to "invoke memory", physically and mentally. Personal archives, such as photographs, newspaper articles, and even fictitious stories heard from the relatives, and first-hand immigrant experiences from her immediate family act as stimulators in invoking and recording the collective memory of the family or shared history. Kaisa Ilmonen and Tuula Juvonen, in their article "Queer Traditions: Politics of Remembering" observe that:

> Within the postcolonial field of studies, the act of re/membering has been considered a reconstructive fictional force that separates personally and collectively meaningful instances from the legitimated narrative version of the past and organizes the past in a way that fruitfully supports the process of personal identity. In the context of queer studies, remembering queerly, in a way that creates space for historical queer experiences, turns out to be a reconstructive force. Linda Anderson, a scholar who has published widely on autobiographies, notes that the act of remembering enables a subject to process his/her identity. Thus, Anderson considers the acts of remembering as space where a person is not compelled to repeat the past mechanically (4).

Minal's attempt at remembering the family history through writing leads her to delve into historical trauma. As immigrant settlers, her predecessors had to undergo traumatic experiences to fit-in and make a living. The family's shared history reflects the trauma of experiencing financial difficulties, racial discrimination, political tension, communal violence, and nostalgia for the homeland. However, Minal's memory documents yet another struggle dealing with her sexuality. The constant bullying in her neighbourhood and school makes her conscious of her "outsider status" in the United States. Minal's psychological trauma has resulted from her attempts to come to terms with her sexuality, hide it from her parents due to the fear of rejection, and emotional alienation for being "different" from others in her peer group.

Similarly, the character of Ismail in *Six Meters of Pavement* suffers from the traumatic memory of losing his daughter to his parental mistake. Ismail's daughter was locked inside a car and suffocated to death at a young age. Ismail gradually falls into loneliness and depression, followed by the tragic death of his wife. His occasional visit to the relatives settled in the same

city often ends in conflict as he is constantly reminded of his loss and his rootlessness in the West. In neuroscience and clinical psychology, the interaction between personal and shared/collective memory is identified as "associative memory". In his review of Anderson and Bower's idea of associative memory, critic Andrew Ortony observes that the memory is analogous to a working model of a computer programme. According to Ortony:

> Human Associative Memory is at once several things. First, it is a theory of human memory, particularly, but not exclusively, memory for linguistic material; it is a theory concerning the way in which such information is encoded, retrieved, and related to existing knowledge. …According to the theory, human long-term memory can be represented as a vast network of interconnected propositions. These propositions get into memory either through the agency of a linguistic parser or a perceptual parser (396).

In addition, certain olfactory elements and objects can invoke memory. These memory stimulators often act as mediators in inculcating the element of trauma. For instance, Bharat identifies the smell of fabric softeners as "the smell of America" (128) during his sojourn to the United States. The memory of his homeland is associated with the peculiar smell of his Indian household. The absence of familiar smells in the American home leaves him with the yearning to return to India. The nostalgia and memory associated with his homeland add to his psychological distress. In *Stealing Nasreen*, Nasreen's sudden behavioural change during her visit to her father's place can be traced down to her association of the familiar perfume smell with the memory of her late mother. She is engulfed in grief and misery as the perfume invokes the memory of her mother. Similarly, Farzana Doctor uses a "bottle of orange juice" to simulate her memories of her mother during their visit to an Indian restaurant. A photograph and handwritten

cards are other memory stimulators that the writer has used to depict the trauma that the absence of Nasreen'n ex-girlfriend Connie has caused in her life.

Furthermore, Salma's trunk from India in *Stealing Nasreen* and Pooja's "memory box" in *The Exiles* can be identified as the most direct representation of the association between individual memory and trauma. For Salma and Pooja, those material objects in the box do not merely invoke nostalgic memories of the homeland; but act as a reminder of the unsettling conflicts of the past. Pooja's memory box brings back memories related to the tragic death of her family members during the riot in South Africa. In contrast, Salma's trunk reminds her of the evidence of her repressed sexuality. All these instances can be identified as personal archives. However, the role of personal archives in documenting the shared cultural memory of queer and diasporic communities cannot be forgotten. These personal accounts of invoking memory signify the importance of unresolved conflicts, repressed sexuality, alienation, and the process of othering in queer diaspora narratives. All these can be looked upon as underlying conditions that constitute the element of trauma.

The intersection between personal and collective memory can also be seen in the representation of unheard queer voices in *The Exiles* and *My Magical Palace*. The character of Zainab aunty in *The Exiles* can be identified as a foil character to the protagonist Atif. Similarly, the character of Colonel Uncle can be looked upon as a foil to the character of Rahul. Both these characters are forced to repress their homosexual desires as they negotiate their sexuality with heteronormative social values. Through their interaction with these foil characters, Atif and Rahul understand the impending doom that awaits them if they disclose their sexuality. Aunty Zainab is confined to domesticity, whereas Colonel Uncle remains a spinster as his Italian boyfriend is married and settled abroad. Though this might seem a mere representation of

personal memory, the same can be encoded into cultural memory. A similar pattern of decision-making based on the stigmas associated with queer sexuality is reflected in these narratives. While decoding the emotion and effect in the representation of these foil characters, the children of alternate sexuality learn the homophobic social structure in their childhood through these characters and their interaction with society. The sense of rejection, humiliation, confusion, and fear that these personal memories can instill in the children can be transformed into the queer public culture while analysing trauma.

Another critical aspect of the politics of memory that needs to be discussed is the role of literature in documenting queer memory. According to Thomas R Dunn:

> Queer memory and its capacity to make powerful interventions into politics, culture, and society represent a significant new enactment of the term. As an area of study, queer memory … draws heavily from the confluence of memory studies and queer theory, both of which arrived at the end of the 20th century. It was also accelerated by the exigency that is HIV/AIDS…scholars have gravitated to the recovery and circulation of the memories of queer individuals, movements, and institutions; the queering of the study and practice of memory itself; and the reconsideration of the archive through a queer lens. (*Oxford Research Encyclopedia, n.p.)*

The personal archives of queer narratives need to reach a larger audience to fight against homophobia and sensitise mainstream society. These personal archives are crucial in spreading awareness and envisioning gender-sensitised social structures. As KaisaI lmonen and Tuula Juvonen suggest, “Literature and poetry are particular archives of cultural memory created by

authors who inevitably store the collective affects of their own (corpo)-reality – also those related to sexuality. Those affects also influence the narration of queer cultural memory" (3). The contributions made by contemporary queer diaspora writers to the literary canon, do not merely add to the postcolonial hegemony of giving voice to the underprivileged – marginalized sections of the society, but also help in the gradual rupture of stigmas and taboos in due course of time. As Tavetti observes:

> Memory, cultural or individual, differs from fabrication as it claims to discuss the past as it really was. Sometimes this may involve opposing academic history which may feel − especially for the marginalised and excluded − as not revealing the past from their viewpoint. For something to be meaningful as a memory, it needs to have a feeling of truth − as in literature, the truth of a literary work is not based on the credibility of individual details but on the usability of the story for the readers and its potential to empower (48).

The impact that literature can bring in academic and mainstream spaces can be seen in Tavetti's analysis. The personal archives, through literature can constitute the shared queer history. More than the therapeutic or healing effect of writing through the process of remembering, these writers empower a section of underprivileged minority gender to embrace their sexuality in public. According to Kaisa Ilmonen and Tuula Juvonen:

> In literature, depictions of memories and remembering highlight the changing nature of the past. Subjective conceptions concerning the past are not static facts but in a constant process of becoming – powered by memory….creative reconstruction enables the author to overcome the stagnated, legitimate narrative

> of the past and allows her to re/ member history anew. Literary rewritings of conventionally narrated histories highlight literature's potential to re-structure the past, while representations of personal remembering bring forth various versions of the past inter-subjectively (3).

The invocation of memories from the past, both personal and cultural, is used as an effective literary technique to indicate the notion of trauma. The writers discuss the role of memory in representing a sense of belonging/non-belonging, alienation, and repressed sexuality. The writers provide personal accounts of memories associated with being an "Other" in diasporic and sexual contexts. These personal archives of memory that project the element are crucial in forming collective memory. Therefore, as presented by the writers through literature, personal narratives can be identified as a significant factor in documenting queer diasporic history.

3.3: Interpretation of Dreams: A Reflective Analysis of Queer Immigrant Identity and Trauma

In psychoanalysis and cognitive studies, dreams are often associated with trauma. As opined by Lutz Wittmann, "analysis of dreams is crucial in the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and psychotherapy" (Wittmann, 28). The psychological framework of a recurrent dream involves unresolved conflicts in the mind, stress, anxiety, and trauma followed by abuse or violence. In the article titled "Trauma, dream, and psychic change in psychoanalyses: a dialog between psychoanalysis and the neurosciences", Tamara Fischmann, Michael O. Russ and Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber describe how human minds conceive specific dream stimulators, which is scientifically termed as "dream complexes" (3), either from the immediate environment (present) or from the memories (past). They observe;

> In dream research dreaming is described as a thought-process in which our inner system is engaged in processing information (Dewan, 1970). Inner (cognitive) models are constantly being modified in coordination with what is perceived. In contrast to dreaming reactions to our environment are immediate during the waking stage, thus enabling information consolidation into memory only limited by capacity restrictions of the system itself. Nevertheless, consolidation processes do continue during sleep in an "off-line" modus, thus enabling integration into the long-term memory here (Fischmann,et al, n.p).

These writers focus on the intricate nature of the process of dreaming and how dreams can often be looked upon as a neuro-scientific attempt to find possible solutions to particular problems that complicate the human mind and its association with the study of post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, Fischmann and others conducted a clinical study to track down the neurological pattern in which dream complexes are being transformed into possible solutions, which are "governed by the need for security and wish for involvement, i.e., the *security-principle* and the *involvement-principle*" (3) through the process of clinical therapy. According to Fiscmann and others;

> "dream complexes" are activated by current events, process the entirety of information deriving from unsolved conflicts and traumatic situations while dreaming. The dream searches for solutions or rather best possible adaptations for these dream complexes. A dream, which is usually pictorial, consists of at least one situation produced by a "dream-organizer." Dream-organization may be considered— according to Moser—as a bundle of affective-cognitive procedures, generating a micro-world—the dream—and controlling its course of action.

> Within this system the "dream-complex" is a template facilitating dream organization. Thus, it may be assumed that a "dream-complex" originates from one or more complexes stored in the long-term-memory, rooted in … [conflicts] and/or traumatizing experiences (3).

Following the concept of Fischmann and others, this section of the dissertation focuses on the analysis of dreams in the context of queer diaspora narratives as an effective method used by the authors in the manifestation of trauma. The writers express the significance of clinical therapy in healing, especially in texts such as *Stealing Nasreen,* where the protagonist herself is a clinical psychologist. Similarly, in *My Magical Palace* and *No Other World*, the parents depend on therapy to recover their children from depression and "behavioral abnormalities". In such cases, absolute ignorance about homosexuality is very much evident. However, the primary focus of this section of research is not limited to the process of clinical therapy. Instead, a close look at the representation of dream complexes deriving from traumatic experiences, both in terms of alternate sexuality and immigrant sensibility, is explored. In addition, the section also attempts to address the change in the pattern of the depiction of dreams to suggest the process of healing, beyond the limits of clinical assistance.

The study indicates that traumatic dreams are often resulted from unsettling conflicts in mind. Furthermore, these conflicts might have originated from the loss/death of an important person, anxiety, fear factor, humiliation, or bullying. Nasreen's dream about her deceased mother signifies the trauma she experiences followed by guilt over unfulfilled promises after losing her mother to cancer. The author depicts the dream sequence in which the deceased mother tries to communicate with Nasreen from India. The diasporic sensibility of the first-generation migrants in terms of rootlessness, nostalgia, and home is evident in the depiction of this dream. Nasreen's

unconscious attempt to pacify the loss of her mother is reignited with the dream sequence in the middle of her psychological distress.

Similarly, Rahul's recurrent nightmares in *My Magical Palace* represent his shame and guilt about his sexuality. The fear of tarnishing the family honour and goodwill constantly disturbed his peace of mind. In addition, the religious violence he witnessed in India and the bullying in school has worsened his traumatic experience. Farzana Doctor's *Six Meters of Pavement* also depicts how guilt and pain transform into a nightmare as the protagonist, Ismail, lives alone carrying the pain of losing his daughter. Self-blame instigated trauma in Ismail as his baby was killed to parental mistake. Doctor provides a detailed account of Ismail's child getting locked up and suffocating to death in the car. The incident shatters Ismail's relationship with his wife, and he succumbs to self-blame and isolation.

Similarly, Ritwik's recurrent dreams about his mother and feeling the presence of his late mother's apparition throughout his life can be analysed as a manifestation of the haunting memories from childhood. Ritwik could never come to terms with his mother's strange behaviour and cruel punishments from her despite his love for his mother for all the struggles she has put up with while raising him and the younger brother. Child abuse was normalised and naturalised in his home; therefore, he could not comprehend the law against child abuse in the UK when he migrated. The internalised traumatic experiences are explored through the recurrent dream sequence in *A Life Apart*. On the other hand, Salma's dream of losing the trunk from home during the shipment signifies her fear of losing ties to her homeland. Salma's Indianness often intersected with the process of assimilation in Canada, even though she was excited about the diasporic journey that she had embarked upon. This dilemma of immigrants in a new land can be considered part of the shared migration history.

Unfulfilled desires and repressed sexuality are other factors that constitute the traumatic pattern in the interpretation of dreams in select narratives. Salma's dream of walking hand in hand with Raj through a park in Mumbai in broad daylight reflects her unfulfilled dream of embracing her true identity. This dream represents her confusion and psychological dilemma regarding her true self, even though she denies her sexuality to respect the marital bond. Similarly, Rahul's dream of physical intimacy with his on-screen hero, Rajesh Khanna, also represents a manifestation of his repressed sexuality.

The therapeutic effect dreams can have on the subjects suffering from trauma is depicted by Farzana Doctor in *Stealing Nasreen*. Nasreen nurtures intimate feelings towards her ex-girlfriend despite the emotional damage that her relationship with Connie has caused in her life. The act of keeping her photos and handwritten cards also suggest the same. The plot provides instances of emotional manipulations from Connie's side. For example, Connie takes advantage of Nasreen's vulnerable state of mind and takes the initiative to engage in a sexual encounter during her visit to collect her passport from Nasreen's house. Nasreen recollects the dream she had on the same night in which Connie is seen running after money, and Nasreen follows her everywhere in the shape of a puppy. Connie brutally ignores the presence of the desperate puppy that follows her. This dream acted as an "eye opener" to Nasreen. She starts thinking about her self-esteem and consequently burns off Connie's cards, suggesting an end to the toxic relationship that was emotionally draining Nasreen.

At this juncture, it is essential to look at the character of Kiran in *No Other World*. Kiran's childhood gets scarred by the memory of sexual abuse by a senior. As he grows up, he realises that addressing the violence and encountering the abuser are essential steps that could save him from the trauma. Thus, he begins to write about the incident, but with a few alternations

in the story in order to reaffirm the notion of consent. This meta-narrative helps the protagonist in accepting childhood trauma. However, he still suffers from the dilemma of accepting his sexuality and the fear of coming out. A trip to his family roots in India is presented as a therapeutic method that helps Kiran accept his sexuality. His interaction with Pooja, a *hijra* community member, could drastically change his outlook towards human intimacy and the meaning of life. He sends a letter to his parents revealing his true identity. The psychological impact of coming out during his visit to India is expressed through a visually aesthetic dream. As the narration reveals:

> The details were murky and half lost to that other world, but Kiran knew Pooja had visited him in his dream. He awoke with an image of a vast field of giant sunflowers, like the ones he'd grown up with in Western New York. He and Pooja were making their way among the five-foot-tall stalks, flower heads the size of humans'. Were they trying to find a way out? Or were they happy to be wandering, lost together? (Mehta, 195-6)

This dream does remain a critical stage in Kiran's journey to self- actualization. The author has used this dream as a literary device to suggest the queer subject's self-acceptance and coping mechanism to deal with his trauma efficiently.

A detailed analysis of the importance of visual images in dreaming is required, as they stimulate trauma in fear, anxiety, or depression. A wide range of visual images can act as dream stimulators which may or may not have visible connections or direct links to the traumatic experiences. A collaborative clinical study was conducted by Girija Kaimal, Melissa S Walker, Joanna Herres, Louis M French, and Thomas J DeGrabato examine trauma among the veterans

of the US military force. The study's findings were published under the title "Observational study of associations between visual imagery and measures of depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress among active-duty military service members with traumatic brain injury at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center". The study reveals that the human brain can even twist and tweak/ manipulate specific visual images to stimulate the traumatic aspect, thereby escalating the degree of depression or anxiety. The idea of relative memory, which is discussed in detail in the earlier section on memory, becomes significant in this context. The study conducted by Girija Kaimal and others was primarily based on the observations made by the subjects on the artistic masks comprised of various patterns. The writers observed that:

> when such imagery is depicted, such that depiction of psychological struggles might be an indicator of heightened symptoms of post-traumatic stress requiring targeted care … When we reviewed artwork of combat veterans with PTSD, we found evidence of 'post-traumatic conflict being experienced and depicted by the graphic themes of war and the telling of self-portraits of disfigurement symbolic of alteration of one's previous self' (6).

Though the experiment was conducted among select groups of military officials, this study signifies the importance of natural symbols, colour symbolism, and material and non-material metaphors in stimulating unsettled traumatic conflicts. The writers examine the sense of belonging and non-belonging among trauma patients with particular reference to racial features and the colour of the uniform or national flags. However, the study's relevance in the context of queer diaspora narratives lies in how direct or indirect stimulators affect the subjects in transferring the stimulators into the form of dreams. This transformation of stimulators into

dreams with the help of creative imaginations can be looked upon as a manifestation of traumatic self-expression. As Kaimal and others observe:

> The association between post-traumatic stress scores and visual depiction of psychological injury suggests that this might be a forum for safe self-expression…. Some of the healing elements seen in art therapy are the promotion of self-exploration, self-expression, symbolic thinking, creativity and sensory stimulation (8).

In his *No Other World,* Rahul Mehta explores the same method of converting/transforming a natural visual image into a dream in order to depict the notion of immigrant trauma. Shanti's dilemma in adjusting to the new world is suggested through a dream that was stimulated by cobwebs and spiders in her house. "And then there were the spiders. And spider webs. Everywhere. In every corner, in every window, under every side table, behind the black faux Chinese cabinet" (14). Mehta narrates how "Shanti never told him about the dreams she'd had those first few weeks in America in this house, when Nishit was spending long hours at the office and she was alone. Dreams in which spiders wove tight webs that covered all the windows, all doors, trapping her" (14). The readers are introduced to the diasporic trauma caused to Shanti by the sense of non-belonging, rootlessness, nostalgia, and the pull of home as she narrates her dream in a melancholic tone.

Therefore, it can be summarised that the dream can be identified as one of the primary devices that the writers have incorporated to represent various nuances of traumatic reality in the context of queer diaspora narratives. Hence, themes such as shame, loss, rejection, sexual abuse, repressed sexuality, unfulfilled desires, rootlessness, nostalgia, sense of belonging and non-

belonging, and guilt that cause internal conflict and trauma in the select queer diasporic narratives can be traced through the interpretation of dreams.

3.4: Use of Symbols and Animal Imageries as Expressions of Trauma

Effective use of figurative language in presenting the subject matter can be identified as one of the common traits of select queer diaspora narratives. These writers have effectively depicted the element of trauma regarding queer subjectivity and diasporic sensibility in their attempt to incorporate symbols and imagery. M. H. Abrams and Harpham define imagery as a collective term, which is "used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in … literature, whether by literal description, by *allusion*, or in the *vehicles* (the secondary references) … similes and metaphors". They further explain that image or imagery is not limited to imply "visual reproduction of objects", but it also appeals "to qualities that are auditory, tactile (touch), thermal (heat and cold), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), and kinesthetic (sensations of movement)" (169). Similarly, the symbol stands for the representation of a significant idea. To quote Abrams and Harpham: "the term 'symbol' is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself" (394). Thus, symbols and imageries in a work of literature play a decisive role as it enhances the aesthetic value of the text, and instigates readers' imagination and creative sensibility. In addition, symbols and imagery enrich the subject matter, often playing a crucial part in the development of events narrated in the plot.

The diaspora writers often employ meticulous use of symbols, imageries, and other figurative linguistic-literary devices to depict themes ranging from nostalgia and homeland to cultural conflict. Renowned diaspora writers like Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni, V S Naipaul, and Anita Desai have incorporated allegories, metaphors, similes, and symbols in order to bring out the realistic diaspora experiences in their respective works. The notion of homeland, cultural dynamics, dislocation, the concept of in-betweenness and rootlessness, the process of assimilation, and other common thematic patterns of conventional diaspora writing are often presented through the appropriate figurative language. Symbols and imageries, either with the use of artifacts or references to the past, are commonly used in diaspora writing to inculcate a nostalgic tone. Similarly, queer diaspora writers like Farzana Doctor, Kunal Mukherjee, Rahul Mehta, and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla have experimented with symbols and imageries. However, they incorporate symbols and imageries to explore the process of identity formation regarding diasporic sensibility and queer subjectivity. These writers have emphasised on the significance of symbolism in the intersection between diaspora and alternate sexuality that facilitates the exploration of trauma in their works. Thus, a detailed analysis of symbols and imageries that imply the element of trauma is explored in this section.

The significance of identity markers such as food, clothing, language, and racial markers in immigrant writing has been studied by various well-known critics like Avtar Brah, Gayatri Gopinath, William Safran, Appadurai, James Clifford, and Alan Sinfield. In the context of select queer diaspora narratives, particular objects and artifacts that the immigrants carry in their attempt to re-live memories are used as mediums to document personal and cultural histories. In addition, the authors use various forms of imagery to establish the traumatic element of queer diasporic reality.

The family photo album is one of the significant imagery Farzana Doctor employs in her novel *Stealing Nasreen*, to narrate the characters' diasporic and sexual journey. For Nasreen and Salma, the photo album not only upholds the past memories, but also reflects their completely

opposing responses and attitudes towards their own sexuality. Doctor explores the importance of familial relationships in the diaspora context through the photo album image. Each photo in the album stands as an epitome of happiness to Nasreen that she has experienced in the company of her favorite people. At the same time, the absence of those same people adds to her psychological distress and trauma. As she loses her mother to cancer and her girlfriend Connie to another woman, their photos in the album evoke a sense of fear and abandonment in Nasreen. However, Nasreen gracefully accepts her personal tragedies and decides not to succumb to depression. The image of Nasreen adding new photos to the album and embracing her memories in the novel's climax suggest that she has learned to accept her identity and earned the courage to move on in life despite all the hardships.

On the other hand, Doctor uses the same imagery concerning the character of Salma in order to represent the dilemma of a married woman. She miserably fails to embrace her sexuality as it clashes with her sense of morality. Salma decides to hide it from others even though she is deeply attached to each photo in the album. She is afraid of the shame and embarrassment that could bring along by exposing the evidence of a previous lesbian relationship through the photographs. Salma chooses to hide the photo album even after her husband learns everything about Salma's lesbian partner Raj Patel from Mumbai. She admits her relationship with Nasreen as her husband senses the sexual tension between them. Her decision to hide the album from her husband reflects the internal conflict between embracing her sexuality and fulfilling her moral duties as a wife.

An Indian painting of a Rani [queen] and her servant gifted by a relative to Salma's family is another important imagery the writer employs in the novel. Though Salma is apprehensive of exhibiting the painting in the dining hall as "she wonders …if the painting is a

little bawdy or lewd" (Doctor, 110) and Shaffiq is uncomfortable about the revealing traditional attire of the women in the painting, soon the painting becomes the most valued possession to her. The doctor impersonates this material symbol to Salma's confidant, for she reveals her long-kept secret about her sexuality and relationship with Raj Patel to the painting. Salma is interested in imagining the dynamics of the emotional attachment of the subjects in the painting (Rani and the servant), which could be looked upon as the suggestive mechanism to predict Salma's alternate sexuality in the first part of the text. Salma's emotional attachment and repressed sexual desires result in a complex scenario where she begins to identify herself as part of the painting and feels the servant's gaze on her. An excerpt from *Stealing Nasreen* is given below:

> She studies the rani's serene face, and notices for the first time that the servant's gaze is not really averted away from her queen, but directed out at the viewer, at Salma. That's strange… why hadn't I noticed that before? She matches the servant's stare, appraising her as she feels she is being appraised. Salma imagines the servant standing slightly taller, steadying her posture, her brown nipples pushing against the thin fabric of her blouse. Salma views herself in the painting's glass reflection, wondering what the servant might see in her. Salma too stands more erect…and it seems to her that now the rani, too, is glancing her way. The weight of both stares makes Salma inexplicably self-conscious and so she backs away, averting her gaze (Doctor, 129).

The writer focuses on the traumatic undertone in this given passage, where the character's repressed sexuality is highlighted. Salma's emotional attachment to the painting represents her psychological distress more than as a mere expression of evolved artistic sensibility or a creative interaction between the work of art and the audience.

In addition, a “bright green blouse” is presented as a symbol that suggests the blooming physical intimacy between Nasreen and Salma. The author hints at the growing intimacy between the characters as Salma digs out the blouse from the wardrobe for Nasreen, who was drenched in rain when she reached for the Gujarati language class. However, the same blouse becomes an object of suspicion to Shaffiq as he senses Salma’s behavioural changes. A cactus is used as a symbol which was handed over to Nasreen by Connie as a peace offering when she revisited the house to collect her passport. It can be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between those two. Following the Native American belief, the cactus stands for warmth, motherly love, and endurance, which suggests the character’s ability to thrive in harsh conditions. Farzana Doctor’s style of writing is rich with simple yet significant symbols and imageries, which establish the intricacies in the lives of queer diaspora subjects.

A travel itinerary is another diasporic symbol that Doctor has used to reflect the struggling immigrants’ attachment to the homeland with reference to the character of Shaffiq, an experienced Indian accountant who was forced into the job of a janitor in Canada. Shaffiq was desperately dreaming of crossing geographical boundaries while stealing his crumpled travel itinerary of Nasreen while cleaning the clinic. He is caught “in-between” his attachment to the homeland and hopes in the new land even though he is presented as an optimistic immigrant ready to undergo any ordeal to have a better life there.

A teardrop silver earring is another symbol that represents Nasreen’s emotional vulnerabilities in a nutshell. The author’s creative way of referring to the shape of the earring [tear drop] also signifies that it was gifted by Nasreen’s mother when she was diagnosed with cancer. Further, Nasreen associates the earring with her then-girlfriend Connie, whose constant support and love helped her heal from the pain and agony caused by her mother’s death. The

panic and sorrow in Nasreen after losing the earring reflect her heartbroken state of mind, followed by the break-up with Connie and her mother's death. Interestingly, the earring symbolises her traumatic memories and the chaos that her relationship with Salma has created in her mind. She later learns that the earring was stolen by Shaffiq and reached the hands of Salma, who was secretly keeping it behind the painting. Such a dramatic turn of events in the plot, symbolised in the form of an earring, points to the trauma in the lives of the protagonists in terms of memories and sexuality.

Similarly, Minal Hajratwala, in her *Leaving India,* uses the image of a wall to discuss her struggles as a queer immigrant. As she was growing up, she had to distance herself from her parents and their moral codes. Similarly, she stayed away from fellow Indian schoolmates as she did not qualify to be a "typical *sanskari* Indian". She distanced herself from her American classmates due to the agony of bullying. Furthermore, most importantly, she senses a "wall" that interrupts her from accepting her own body as she was in a state of utter confusion after realising that her body does not fit under the so-called "normal" female body. The image of the thick wall can be considered her self-discovered defense mechanism until she begins to conquer the realm of writing and queer activism. Thus, the wall symbolises the trauma her skin colour and body induced . As Hajratwala says:

> I pretended invisibility as much as I could, and They pushed and pushed for a reaction. It was like a game, but it was a war. I had to have a wall… He [a fellow classmate who was also bullied like Minal] was back the next day, and it was worse than ever for him. I had no doubt it was traumatic stress: emotional misfit syndrome. I saw that his wall was not strong enough. I erected mine tall and circular, a region of the imagination that was inviolate, where no one could touch

> me. Its bricks were fear, shame, silence. Even my parents had to be outside… They were social success stories; I was a failure. I did not think they could possibly understand me. Besides, I was ashamed of anything that made my different (Hajratwala, 308-9).

Hajratwala further uses the ocean metaphor to suggest the nature of diaspora communities in Africa, where her ancestors were settled. The picturesque ocean metaphor is used to explore the notion of co-existence and assimilation. Using the ocean as a metaphor where two different coloured water joins together without any hustle, she says, "Like the several great civilizations that have clashed and coexisted in southern Africa over the last two centuries, the waters cannot be segregated" (81). She examines how diaspora communities survive in the host nations despite the struggles and cultural differences. Hajratwala also implies her traumatic experiences of recording her family's migration journey and her dream of a diasporic utopia. To quote Hajratwala:

> At the southernmost tip of Africa… where two oceans meet…one sea is browner, the other bluer, and it is not a trick of the light. To the west, the cool Atlantic swells up toward London, New York, and South Africa's most picturesque city, Cape Town. To the east, the Indian Ocean is several degrees warmer…almost homelike for the more than a million Indians who have lived there for generations. This confluence of oceans is a rare coincidence of political and natural geography, where the naming does not create an arbitrary border… And yet it is the most fluid, the most porous of borders. East and west meet with a great force (81).

Unlike Hajratwala, the metaphor of the ocean conceives a sexual denotation in Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *The Exiles*. Ocean remains the epitome of the sexual tension, repression and agony in the life of the protagonist Rahul. The presence or memory of the ocean could make him grief-stricken and guilty as it always reminds him of a childhood classmate with whom he was physically involved. Hanif, the classmate, was sexually abused by many boys in the class, including the protagonist. The fear and shame of disclosing his homosexual instincts in public made him reject Hanif, ultimately leading to Hanif's tragic death. Hanif jumped off the cliff on Bamburi beach and drowned as he was depressed and humiliated about his sexuality. Rahul feels accountable for the suicide of Hanif. Thus, the ocean is portrayed as a traumatic symbol that reminds him of the boy and his dilemma in accepting his sexuality.

At this juncture, it is essential to analyse the recurrent use of animal imagery by queer diaspora writers. Anthropomorphism in literature, which refers to "the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal, or object"[9], takes a significant role in the select writings of queer diaspora writers as they experiment with the figurative language in order to represent sexuality, gender, and other socio-cultural apparatuses of character development. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his article "Sexual Symbolism of Animals" observes that:

> …cultural use value and attempts at asserting human dominion over nature cannot be the whole story. Because they combine haunting similarity with perturbing difference and proximity with otherness, animals have long been the vehicles through which humans explore their own identities. Through the beast, humans fantasize of new possibilities and enact forbidden desires. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the most ancient functions of the animal is as an erotic

[9] Sourced from the online version of oxford English dictionary

> symbol. In ways both positive and negative humans have always realized that amatory desire is, like other bodily drives, a passion *Homo sapiens* shares with other animals (n.p).

Cohen proceeds to critically examine the significance of animal symbolism with special emphasis to the metaphor of snakes as he says; "Although certain creatures, such as snakes, have a seemingly universal aura of lasciviousness, whether a particular animal will be employed as a sexual sign is culturally specific and depends greatly on the animals that populate a particular geography (n.p)". The serpent metaphor in *Stealing Nasreen* does not simply refer to the notion of sexuality, as Asha warns Nasreen about the toxic relationship with the ex-girlfriend Connie. An excerpt from the text is given below:

> 'That girl is a snake and she just bit you. There's something about her that makes you way too vulnerable. I'm not sure you should be spending time with her… Are you going to see her again?'
>
> 'No, I guess not. You're right. I just don't hold my own when I'm with her. She just.. I don't know what it is about her… That should be enough time for me to suffer through the withdrawal. Again. When she's back, I'll be strong again'.
>
> 'Nasreen,… Her venom stays in your blood for a long time.'…
>
> 'Geez, Geez, what's with all the serpent metaphors?' (Doctor, 190-91).

The primary focus behind the use of the serpent metaphor can be analysed in this context as the toxicity of human relationship. The conversation conveys the vulnerable side of the character, who finds it challenging to free herself from the constriction of the "snake". However, the use of

the snake as a symbol in this instance can also be looked upon as a subtle reference to the erotic sexual intimacy between Nasreen and Connie, which could also titillate the readers' creative imagination. Thus, the function of animal symbolism can be varied in different contexts. Many diaspora writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, and Sujata Bhatt have effectively incorporated animal imagery and symbols. The diverse natural imageries in Bhatt's poems, especially animal imageries, represent her affinity and nostalgia towards her homeland. Bhatt portrays the beauty of Indian villages through animal imagery, ranging from elegant peacocks to often ignored insects. Animal imageries in Bhatt's poems are highly suggestive, as it effectively communicates her memories associated with the homeland.

Similarly, the protagonist Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's first novel, *Tiger's Daughter,* represents the identity crisis among migrants. The constant search for identity as she crosses geographical boundaries can be treated as the central theme in the novel. The author uses the tiger, as mentioned in the title, as a symbol to portray the perseverance and strength that the character upholds during the crisis. Despite portraying the hardships relating to assimilation, acculturation, and cultural conflict on migration, Mukherjee uses animal imagery as a significant notion that conveys the autobiographical element of the author's search for self and identity. In addition, Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* can also be considered as a significant text that uses animal imagery to depict diasporic sensibility. Through the symbolic reading of the Blackbird in the novel, she refers to London's hostile living condition and the Londoners's attitude towards immigrants. Both Mukherjee and Desai use animal imagery to portray the hardships of immigrants.

Referring to the works on animal metaphors by the critic Brandes, the well-known anthropologist Eugenia Shanklin in her article "Sustenance and Symbol: Anthropological Studies of Domesticated Animals" classifies the mode of human-animal interaction. To quote Shanklin:

> Brandes identifies three areas of conscious comparison between animals and humans: first, human character traits, e.g. the burro is considered stupid and stubborn and a person who exhibits those traits will be called a burro; second, physical qualities, e.g. oversized breasts may cause a woman to be likened to a milk-giving cow; and third, a category of functional equivalence in which animals and humans are equated, e.g. mules and barren women, neither of which can reproduce. Brandes is careful to point out, however, the polysemic qualities of many terms (394).

Another important aspect of animal symbolism is the representation of the therapeutic existence of pet animals in the lives of the characters/ subjects who are victims of trauma. Rahul Mehta's narration on the memory of pet birds in an immigrant household also gives a picture of the curtailed lives of immigrant kids. The kids were restricted from moving out of the house in their parents' absence to avoid racial bullying in the neighbourhood. Deepa and Shanti, the pet birds, were brought home to keep the kids from boredom when they were confined within the house. The author represents the state of immigrants in the new world, using the image of caged birds with their wings clipped. Unlike Rahul Mehta, writers like Dhalla, Neel Mukherjee, and Farzana Doctor depict a different version of human-pet animal interaction where childhood innocence is replaced with the monotony of adulthood. The intriguing presence of the neighbour's cat in *The Exiles* reminds of "otherness" and boundaries for the protagonist, Atif. Similarly, the cat in *A Life Apart* remains an intimidating figure in the life of Kiran. Kiran is forced to look after the cat

as the landlady, Anna Cameron, is deeply attached to the pet. Dhalla and Mukherjee provide subtle references to how the initial tension between the cats and the characters eases a relatively peaceful co-existence. This could also be seen as a metaphor for the process of assimilation and sense of belonging despite the cultural differences. The "cultural other" in this context "erodes the boundary between species, sometimes through joyful commingling, sometimes accompanied by horror mixed with fascination…as intimate aliens, animals embody a very human ambivalence", as opined by Cohen. Farzana Doctor's depiction of the intimacy between the protagonist Nasreen and the cat brings out another aspect of human-animal interaction. The cat named Id is presented as solace in the character's solitude throughout the novel. Id, the name of the cat, could be seen as a deliberate choice by the author to establish the nature of relationship with the owner and pet with a Freudian touch. As the critic Kendra Cherry observes:

> According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality, the Id is the personality component made up of unconscious psychic energy that works to satisfy basic urges, needs, and desires. The Id operates based on the pleasure principle, which demands immediate gratification of needs (n.p).

Interestingly, the presence of the cat Id in *Stealing Nasreen* can be seen as a personification of the Freudian concept of Id, as mentioned above. Nasreen shares an almost human-like emotional intimacy with the cat that accelerates the notion of servitude or sense of authority that are expected of a pet-human interaction. Therefore, the polysemic nature of animal symbolism is significant in depicting pet animal-human interaction.

Steven Baker's "Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation" (1993) is another pioneering study that discusses the theme of animal symbolism. Baker adheres to a

structuralist outlook in his analysis as he emphasises on the element of symbol and signifier. Baker follows an inter-disciplinary approach in his study, and his focal point is on the impact of visual culture on "contemporary popular imagination". Baker explores the impact of animal symbolism on children's identity formation regarding texts ranging from Disney cartoon series to comic books and graphics. He constructs animals "as the archetypal cultural 'other' (preface)", and critically examines the significance of animal symbolism in propagating notions about nationality, jingoism, establishing gender roles, body images and body shaming, power and hierarchy, victimhood, and misrepresentation of sexual/gender minorities, and differently able communities. Though Baker focuses primarily on the visual culture, his ideas on the importance of animal symbolism in the formation and representation of various apparatuses related to gender and sexuality are still relevant in the context of queer diaspora narratives.

A brown fish in Rahul Mehta's *No Other World* is a unique symbol that the author has used to signify the trauma of domesticity in a few words.

> Kiran had excitedly pulled the small brown fish from the muddy water and Chris had helped him remove the hook and release the fish back into the pond, and Shanti thought, What a strange fate, to spend one's life swimming in this tiny pond, nowhere to go, just around and around, to be caught and released, caught and released, and then she wonders, Does it hurt less? Each time, does the flesh toughen, does the hook sting a little less? (Mehta, 81)

With this imagery, the writer focuses on the traumatic survival experience of an immigrant wife in an unhappy marriage union. The clash between Shanti's moral values and sexual desire that led to an extramarital relationship results in the dilemma that the character is bestowed. Her

inclination to moral values brings her back to her husband. However, she realises that the very existence of her utmost happiness cannot be actualised in the marital bond. Shanti personifies her existence with the life of the brown fish. The tiny pond, thus, represents the moral values and devotion that crippled her sexual freedom and the manifestation of desire.

Similarly, Mehta uses the imagery of a stuffed tiger to indicate the masculine power structure. The tiger is gifted by Chris to young Kiran. Though Kiran is well-aware of the illicit intimate relationship between his mother and Chris, he fails to end his attraction towards Chris. The tiger reminds him of Chris' athletic features and becomes integral to his sexual fantasy. The tiger also represents Kiran's of his helplessness like a stuffed animal. In these instances, symbols and images convey moral dilemmas, anxiety, a sense of betrayal, and rejection.

The killing of a rat in *No Other World* and the instant self-invited death of a moth (as it was attracted to lights in the house) in *The Exiles* are two other instances of animal symbolism. The respective authors implicate the politics of power and victimhood. These seemingly insignificant imageries are placed in crucial parts of the respective plots to predict the notion of victimhood. Kiran is deeply disturbed by the sight of killing the rat. The action of hunting down the rat and the killing can be analysed as a suggestive metaphor for the sexual abuse that happens in the immediate future in Kiran's life. Similarly, the moth reminds Pooja of her destiny when her emotional detachment towards her husband begins to grow. The author uses the moth to predict that Pooja could foresee the "emotional death" that awaited her shortly.

Bats and crows are other central animal imagery used by Kunal Mukherjee and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla regarding the impending doom. *Bats* in *My Magical Palace* always remained as the spectators of the history of the Mint House. Furthermore, they vanished overnight as a

dramatic event that predicted the government's decision to demolish the place. The act of demolishing his house is equated to the wiping out of his childhood memories that constituted the foundation of the unresolved conflict and trauma in the protagonist. On the other hand, Dhalla uses the imagery of a crow attack as a metaphor to suggest the communal riot and political tension in South Africa that ultimately led to the brutal killing of many of the close relatives of the protagonist.

Thus, it can be concluded that the effective use of symbols and animal imagery is an essential methodology that contemporary queer diaspora writers have incorporated in their attempt to represent the notion of trauma. Furthermore, the writers have explored the possibilities of documenting traumatic personal memory in forming collective memory and queer public culture. The depiction of dreams is another powerful tool that the writers have effectively used to suggest the notion of trauma among gender minorities. Trauma and the politics of the body (as examined in the previous chapter) can be identified as two major components that affect the process of othering. Discriminatory social responses and internal dilemma include these two components among queer migrant subjects. This necessitated the production of distinct queer safe spaces and resulted in negotiations in host private and public spaces in host countries. The following chapter explores how the production of queer spaces recontextualises the notion of space in diaspora writing.

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Chapter 4

The Production of Queer Spaces: A Critical Enquiry into the Spaces of Belonging

4.1: Introduction

> "Space- *my space*- is not the context of which I constitute the 'textuality': instead, it is first of all my body, and then it is my body's counterpart or 'other', its mirror-image or shadow: it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other. Thus we are concerned, once again, with gaps and tensions, contacts and separations. Yet, through and beyond these various effects of meaning, space is actually experienced, in its depths" (Lefebvre, 184).

The politics of the body, accompanied by the element of trauma, as studied in the previous chapters, act as two significant factors that impact the production of queer spaces. Queer bodies in their attempt to disrupt the gender binaries of heteronormativity undergo traumatic experiences that reflect constant negotiations with the process of "othering'. Subjects of fluid sexuality accentuate on the necessity of producing and representing queer spaces as mainstream social structures succumb to the notion of gender binaries. As Lefebvre opined, the experiences and representation of both formal and informal manifestations of queer spaces reflect "various effects of meaning", ranging from psychological and physical alienation, signs of resistance, class distinction, morality, and racism. According to Lefebvre, "a body so conceived, as produced and as the production of a space, is immediately subject to the determinants of that

space: symmetries, interactions and reciprocal actions, axes and planes, centres and peripheries, and concrete (spatio-temporal) oppositions… it appeared as a 'spatial body'"(195).

The lived experiences of queer migrants, as depicted by the authors[10], which shape the production and representation of distinct queer spaces is explored in this chapter. The chapter is further divided into four sub-sections:

- The significance of literature in the documentation of queer history.
- Home and the sense of belonging: A paradigm shift from nostalgia to identity crisis.
- The representation of academic spaces in queer discourse and visibility
- Locations of informal queer gatherings: An exploration of the popular culture of gay nightlife

The first section examines the significance of literature in the documentation of queer history. The role of queer writers in creating a space in the literary canon also implies the validation and inclusion of shared history/cultural history. Hence, the section primarily addresses the perennial question, how "personal is political?" (Hanisch, 3) in the context of queer diaspora narratives. The chapter proceeds to examine the paradigm shift in the representation of home/ homeland from early diasporic writers to queer migrant writers to analyse the representations of private and public spaces. I intend to analyse how gender fluidity interacts with the notion of homeland, the element of nostalgia, and a sense of belonging. The section on academic spaces begins with a background analysis of the AIDS movement. A brief history of the pride movements, HIV, other major organisations, law and regulation, and human right amendment acts are also provided. The major arguments in this section are based on the characters; Fatima, Nasreen, and Minal

[10]Minal Hajratwala, Neel Mukherjee, Kunal Mukherjee, Rahul Mehta, Farzana Doctor, and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla

Hajratwala. At the same time, the significance of gay nightlife with reference to the popular culture of dance clubs and bars is explored in the section on informal queer spaces. The notion of "Gay Mecca", as explained by the famous Philippine cultural critic Martin F. Manalansan is incorporated to study the political parameters of the representation of informal queer spaces. The role of class and race as catalytic agents in the accessibility and visibility of queer spaces is discussed by following the arguments made in these sections and citing examples from the texts.

The chapter proposes a critical inquiry into the representation of queer spaces by following Lefebvre's concept of the spatial triad. The spatial triad, as observed by Lefebvre, identifies three parameters in understanding the meaning of space. He states that an amalgamation of representational space (lived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spatial practice (perceived space) is essential in the exploration of the meaning of space. In other words, Lefebvre considers the role of physical, mental, and socio-cultural aspects in the production of space. Similarly, the phenomenological notion of "lived experience" proposed by Alfred Schutz is used as a framework to analyse queer subjectivity in different physical manifestations of space, which includes home, educational institutions, and gay pubs[11]. Schutz emphasises on the collective social significance of personal experiences. Therefore, the subjective narratives of discrimination and resistance are examined to lay out the shared queer history using the concept of lived experience.

4.2: The Significance of Literature in the Documentation of Queer History

The second wave of feminism witnessed radical feminist organisations coming together to address narratives of oppression and power relations. Such gatherings often provided

[11] The term 'gay pub' is used here as a collective phrase to symbolically denote all informal spaces of queer gatherings, considering the commonality of the term in queer discourse.

therapeutic assistance to the members by facilitating platforms to share personal experiences of oppression and discrimination. The popular slogan "personal is political" was conceived and widely used during the second-wave feminist liberation movement. Carol Hanisch, a radical feminist member of the New York Radical Women collective, later theorised the popular slogan with the publication of her essay "The Personal is Political" in 1969. Hanisch reiterates the impact of the feminist liberation movement through the establishment of such organisations in introducing the discourse of marriage, motherhood, consent, professional choices, the rhetoric of make-up, and lived experiences of homemakers into the public realm. Simultaneously, social conditioning and centuries-old practices of reasserting gender roles were examined concerning the personal experiences of female population. Likewise, personal experiences constitute the larger framework of the political power structure in the context of queer narratives. Queer literature represents various divisive and hierarchical social structures that call for radical socio-political interventions.

The primary focus of queer literature is to represent queer subjectivity by exploring various dynamics of queer experiences. The writers focus on the significance of representation in literature through the process of telling and re-telling of queer narratives. Queer narratives can be looked upon as the primary stage of recording archives that contribute to the shared queer history. These personal narratives play a significant role in understanding the socio-cultural contexts of the concerned period from a new historicist point of view. Queer narratives are also crucial in documenting the intellectual history of queer subjects, even though they are often embellished with the element of fiction as a literary device. The combination of fact and fiction does not affect the authenticity of queer representation; instead, it strengthens the experiences by stimulating creative sensibility. As Jawaharlal Nehru opined in *The Discovery of India*:

> Facts and fiction are so interwoven together as to be inseparable, and this amalgam becomes an imagined history, which may not tell us exactly what happened but does tell us something equally important what people believed had taken place, what they thought their heroic ancestors were capable of, and what ideals inspired them… Thus, this imagined history, mixture of fact and fiction, or sometimes only fiction, becomes symbolically true and tells us of the minds and hearts and purposes of people (149).

Even though Nehru's observation was pertaining to the context of Indian independence movement, the significance of literature in the documentation of socio-political history is highlighted here. Similarly, writing personal archives of queer experiences signifies the larger context of hierarchy and oppression, since, the heteronormative social structures negate the rights of subjects of alternate sexuality. On the other hand, the writers attempt to expose the prevailing injustice and discrimination in the social system by bringing out the tales of deep-rooted homophobia and racism in queer diaspora writing.

Queer literature envisions the larger objective of educating the mainstream. The fluidity of gender and sexuality and the blurring of boundaries can appear to be scandalising to readers who are subjected to social conditioning by various institutions of heteronormativity and patriarchy. American poet and feminist critic Adrienne Rich in her famous article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) argues that heterosexuality is not a natural phenomenon. However, she presents heterosexuality as a political institution established to curtail female rights. According to Rich, patriarchy operates within a system that encourages women to be dependent on men emotionally, physically, and financially, thereby reasserting the power structure. Rich proposes the notion of a "lesbian continuum" rejecting the compulsive

norms imposed by a male counterpart. Rich argues that the stereotypical usage of the term "lesbian" needs to be reformed and extended to mutual support and camaraderie among women rather than its association with sexuality. Rich's important observation is the absence of lesbian participation in the production of literature and academia. Rich observes that expanding the horizon of female experiences by sharing them through literature and academia can be perennial in subverting the power structure.

Similarly, queer literature plays a significant role in sensitising the reader about gender fluidity and alternate sexuality. Literature becomes a medium for awareness by depicting the impact of taboos, stereotypes and stigmas related to gender and sexuality on queer subjects. The psychoanalytical framework of representing queer subjectivity in literature can also encourage discussions on gender neutrality in mainstream society. Narratives of trauma resulting from abuse, bullying, and other forms of violence provide an innate perspective that promotes further dialogues on queerness. Such archives of personal narratives can be considered as influential political tools in initiating actions, be they subtle or radical actions, towards sustainable changes by incorporating civil society organisations and governing bodies in its structural framework. The themes ranging from mental health issues to decriminalisation and legalisation of the queer union can initiate the conversation on action-oriented measures by concerned authorities.

The study indicates that the process of writing is presented as a mode of resistance in the context of queer narratives. The writers assert that queer archives are significant in ensuring visibility. For instance, Minal Hajtratwala emphasises on the liberating effect of writing about queer experiences in *Leaving India*. Writing for writers like Hajratwala becomes a political question as it can result in the reassertion of queer identity. Writers can use literature as a medium to spread awareness and educate readers on alternate sexuality. However, the impact of

queer narratives is not only limited to the general reading community. Instead, queer literature is crucial in inculcating a sense of belonging and self-worth among gender minorities who remain in the closet. Queer writers depict the notion of shared history as a mechanism that assists in the process of psychological healing to the closeted community members by encouraging them to accept their identity.

From a postcolonial literary point of view, queer narratives subvert the hierarchy of canonical literature rather than its association with sexuality. The dichotomy of "center" and "peripheries" are interrupted when the "other" comes to the forefront and narrates the shared history through personal experiences. The question of identity/ self is recontextualised as the marginalised voice is echoed in queer literature by addressing the process of "othering". However, the hegemony of western participation in queer studies is further subverted with the emergence of narratives from non-western geographies. As Dennis Altman observes:

> Queer theory… emerged out of the particularities of academic and political situations in the USA in the 1990s. It is …not surprising that analysis of (homo) sexuality from within the USA should be largely US- centric, remarkably uninterested in developments in other countries… there are signs of some interest in what might be termed as 'non-western' societies, in particular the relevance of 'queer' to rapidly shifting notions of sexuality and gender regimes (119).

Diaspora writers redraw the western dominance in queer literature by focusing on the 'in-between-ness' of identity in global spaces. Queer narratives by diasporic writers of South Asian origins represent fresh shifting paradigms in queer studies through the exploration of racial/ethnic demarcations in the context of globalisation. For instance, Sri Lankan-Canadian

writer Shyam Selvadurai explores the complexity of merging race and queerness in the diasporic context in his works. The hierarchical stance of West-East literary and academic representations is subverted as the "racialised other" (queer migrant) document his/her lived reality. Therefore, the discourse of queer spatiality corresponds to the literature written on the subject matter. Queer literary narratives play a decisive role in documenting the negotiations that take place in private and public spaces.

4.3: Home and the Sense of Belonging: A Paradigm Shift from Nostalgia to Identity Crisis

The notion of home in diaspora narratives can be identified as an integral theme that most writers have been exploring for decades. The migration facilitates the migrants to re-imagine the idea of home as they cross geographical boundaries. The journey from the homeland (country of origin) to the host land (country of destination) by leaving behind the home space instills a sense of nostalgia in migrants. The home in a diasporic context is often equated with the concept of root from which the idea of rootlessness stems upon. In an interview published in 2017, Homi K. Bhabha observes that the conventional understanding of home in the context of diaspora is as follows:

> …the very term "home" has two aspects of it, just as a concept. One – something to do with the normalized, the naturalized, the inevitable, the original. It's there – the "thereness" of your existence, even more than the "hereness" of your existence. It is always there; this is my home. I understand this landscape. I know these people. I know the language, and so on. So that's one important concept. And the other, it seems to me, is the kind of Conradian idea that home is what you return to. So, there are these two moments of temporality, these two narrative

> moments – coming out of the home and somehow allowing yourself to imagine, whether you can or you can't, that you can go back: so emergence and return are complicit with the concept of home (Stierstorfer, n.p).

Bhabha reasserts the significance of the sense of belonging associated with the notion of home through his explanation of "hereness" and "thereness". Adapting this theory, diaspora writers use nostalgia as a powerful literary tool to revive the past and memories of their homelands.

The formation of Little India or Indian ghettos(or other South Asian counterparts), as presented in the works of writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Monica Ali, and Bapsi Sidhwa, can be analysed as the migrant communities' attempt to recreate miniature versions of their respective homelands. For instance, Bharati Mukherjee provides a nostalgic account of Indian migrants cherishing the 'desi' delicacies, music, and magazines in her work, *Jasmine*. The residential areas hosted Indian pan shops, Hindi magazine stalls, and cassette stores that slowly transformed the spaces into miniature Indian towns, or as Mukherjee stated, 'Little India'. Similarly, Minal Hajratwala in *Leaving India* describes the existence of Indian colonies in Fiji while documenting the history of her family's migration. Such replicas in host countries have resulted from the manifesting of the migrant community's nostalgia for the homeland, where, migrants religiously replicate traditional food habits, customs, rituals, and dressing styles, as noted by Hajratwala. However, the difference in the attitude of first and second generations of migrants towards their homeland can be seen explicitly in the works of writers like Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri's *Namesake* depicts the intimacy that the first-generation migrants keep towards the homeland. In contrast, the younger generation focuses on the process of assimilation to the cultural frameworks of host countries.

The representation of home and the sense of belonging in the context of queer migration depict a different perspective. Queer migrant writers depict how sexuality intersects with the diasporic sensibility, unlike the portrayal of early migrant experiences. The metaphorical construct of home in the context of queer migration is not embellished with the element of nostalgia. In contrast, it signifies the homophobic memories that the queer subjects escape from. The complexity of narrating the diasporic notion of a sense of belonging is evident in the literary texts when the authors depict the lived experiences of stereotypes and taboos regarding gender identity. The writers primarily represent three major imprints of queer domestic spaces in the texts:

- Homophobic Indian households
- Educated and well-settled Indian families in the West
- Families in which the heteronormative institution of marriage and children are involved

Kunal Mukherjee and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla portray the stereotypes and taboos associated with homosexuality in Indian households. Rahul in *My Magical Palace* and Atif in *The Exiles* are described as characters who consider migration as a survival strategy. Both these characters are subjected to the horrors of various homophobic instances during their childhood. Rahul's neighbour Colonel Uncle and Atif's aunt Zainab also stand at the receiving end of constant social monitoring and victimisation. Thus, both Rahul and Atif resort to migration to explore their sexual identity. Rahul and Atif anticipate that migration provides an opportunity for self-actualisation and re-imagine their idea of home in a foreign land.

Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands* (1987) is one of the most discussed autobiographical accounts of queer diaspora experience. Anzaldua negotiates with numerous binaries (gender,

linguistic, cultural and racial) and introduces an image of a new woman, *mestiza*, who celebrates her lesbian immigrant identity against all the odds. Anzaldua says:

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races. I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/ religious male derived beliefs of Indo- Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture ... a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet (102-103).

She was a victim of patriarchy, homophobia and racial discrimination, yet she managed to strive for a new identity "in-between as a new border woman. Anazaldua, Rahul, and Atif equate the process of migration with their search for a new identity. The physical structure of home could not provide sense of security to them as a result of trauma and estrangement they experienced because of their fluid sexuality. Unlike the conventional migration narratives, which attribute home to the notion of belongingness, Mukherjee's and Dhalla's recollection of the memories about home is associated with the childhood trauma they have undergone. Sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier in her famous essay "Coming home: Queer migration and multiple evocations on home", addresses the necessity of reimagining the concept of home in the context of queer migration. According to Fortier;

> Narratives of migration-as-homecoming instigate a noteworthy reversal of the status of 'home' in migration, 'home' remains widely sentimentalized as a space

> of comfort and seamless belonging, indeed *fetishized through the movements between homes*. In other words, the movement away from home-as-origins becomes the vector for reinstating the ideal of 'home' as a site of familiarity and comfort, and for producing or entrenching 'queerness' as *away* from 'home' (Fortier,412).

Therefore, migration can be viewed as a search for a new home for queer subjects by escaping the vulnerabilities encountered in homophobic domestic spaces. However, this simplified modality of transforming the framework of the idea of home in the context of queer diaspora requires further exploration. It is addressed in the following section of this chapter.

Another representation of home spaces in the select narratives can be identified as the households in which the parents are early migrant settlers. In such narratives, the parents are portrayed as progressive, liberal, and assimilated to the cultural codes of the west. Having benefited from decent formal education and financial stability, these parents - as described by Minal Hajratwala and Rahul Mehta- are critical of the patriarchal social structure of their respective homelands. However, they are not free from the taboo associated with homosexuality. The disbelief, shock, denial, and signs of protest from their parents are resulted from their adherence to gender stereotypes when Minal and Kiran reveal their respective sexual identities. Even though such households resort to the notion of gender equality which upholds women's freedom, it can be conflicted with the exclusionary approach towards fluid sexuality. Therefore, queer subjects do not completely associate their home spaces with the notion of belonging. Even though *Leaving India* and *No Other World* provide subtle references to the cooperation between the queer subjects and their parents after coming-out of the closet, Hajratwala and Mehta do not

depict their parents as welcoming and accepting of their identity. On the other hand, Farzana Doctor depicts the bisexual character Fathima's household as an extension of a conventional homophobic Indian household. The parents and relatives claim themselves to be progressive and liberal owing to their years of migratory experiences in the west. However, the fear of social scrutiny makes them disown their daughter and they immediately "threw [her] out of the home" as she reveals her sexual orientation. Unlike the parents in *Leaving India* and *No Other World,* who extended their helping hands to their queer children during the time of distress, Fathima's parents resort to means of violence as they strongly believe that their daughter's sexuality can tarnish the family honour and dignity. A common trait that can be seen in the characters of Minal, Kiran and Fathima, are their audacity to embrace their sexuality despite the disapproval from their parents. Interestingly, this factor can be analysed as a second-generation migrant trait. The idea of home is not limited to the manifestation of a physical entity to them, for they have prioritised their sexuality with notion of belongingness. In his essay "The Meaning of Queer Home" Jason Bryant observes that the concept of belongingness needs to be reformed in the context of queer narratives as the queer subjects associate it with their respective sexual orientation rather than the physical structure of home spaces. He observes that:

> Like "home," we can imagine queer as a concept of be/longing. For, to "be" queer is to be just who one is. And to "long is to imagine, to pine for, or to claim agency as a creative practiced despite others' opinions that one's biological makeup, sexual desires(or lack thereof), or affective affinities frustrate tradition. The queer relation of be/longing implies a subject position as well as an orientation hat imagines non-normative ways of feeling "at home" with gender and sexual desire. (Bryant, 263)

Therefore, the sense of belonging and "feeling-at-home" in the context of queer diaspora narratives is intricate as the notion of home is extended beyond the representation of longing for normative home spaces often equated with the notion of coming back to the roots in a diasporic context. The representation of belongingness requires a nuanced reading in the queer context for fluid gender identity, leading to the aberration of gendered affinity in depicting conventional diasporic home spaces. Kiran and Hajratwala do not associate the element of belongingness with their domestic spaces, as they are constantly reminded of their status as "different" and "other", despite having the courage to be vocal about their respective sexual orientations.

The third mode of the representation of home spaces in the context of queer diaspora narratives involves the social institution of marriage in its framework. In such cases, the conflict in the plot arises from the intersection of heteronormative marital relationships and repressed sexual identity. Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla and Farzana Doctor explore the ethical dilemma[12] that the protagonists undergo from broken marriages due to their repressed sexuality. *The Exile* and *Stealing Nasreen* discuss the elements of trust and guilt by narrating the exploration of the fluid sexual identity of the queer characters outside wedlock that sabotage the cordial and peaceful environment in the domestic spaces. Dhalla and Doctor also emphasise the agency of children in the home spaces. The exploration of sexual identity by their queer parent is questioned on the grounds of not only morality, but also the interpersonal relationship between the child and parent. Nasreen resorts to her motherly responsibilities and commitment to her husband by deliberately repressing the queer sexual desire that was stimulated during her brief affair with her female student. The character represents a grief-stricken Indian mother who, for the sake of her

[12] The term ethical dilemma here refers to the psychological conflict and uncertainty in the characters while navigating through the exploration of their sexual identity and moral sanctity of marriage, as portrayed in the select literature.

children, hides her sexuality. Nasreen's characterisation focuses primarily on the ethical dilemma of a queer subject whose responsibilities as a mother and wife outweigh her exploration of long repressed sexual identity. On the other hand, Dhalla depicts the concept of ethical dilemma that goes beyond the notion of self-sacrifice and commitment. The plot's dramatic events lead the character of the protagonist's teenage son murdering his father's queer partner by accusing him of being a "home-wrecker". The writers depict the element of conflict that is manifested in the form of guilt, shame, trust issues, and morality through the representation of home spaces in which the institution of marriage is involved.

At this juncture, exploring the notion of "homelessness" in the context of queer diasporic narratives is important. The protagonist Ritwik in *A Life Apart* identifies himself as an "outsider" for his immigrant status and fluid sexual identity make him a "misfit" in mainstream western society. He fails to find himself a home in London. His expired student visa makes him an illegal immigrant, and he forces himself into prostitution in the streets of London for survival. However, the plot reveals that his status as a "homeless" person is not merely an outcome of his status as an illegal immigrant in the host nation. The deep-rooted childhood trauma that he carries within himself and the repressed sexual desire evoke a sense of insecurity and alienation. He remains homeless and fails to assimilate into mainstream society as his traumatic memories lead to psychological estrangement.

> His memories at once displace and relocate his 'child' as an outsider, but one which brings into play his lonely 'I' with a collective 'we' in the creation of new terrains of belonging where multiple 'strangers' coexisted. The act of reconnoitering reconciles … with his 'home', indeed relocates him as queer-outsider *within* the 'home', rather than without (Fortier, 414).

Diasporic communities thrive on the search for a sense of belonging. As Frontier says, the vulnerable status of immigrants as they remain "outsiders" in the mainstream western society instigates them to search for "new terrains of belonging". According to the sociological studies, racial and national identity is subjected to segregation and discrimination in a multicultural environment. The formation of "Little India" or Indian ghettos is an outcome of such segregation. However, such community spaces are not often free from the moral values of heteronormativity. Queer immigrants remain "outsiders" even in the national or regional community spaces as their sexual preferences are perceived as variants or "abnormal". Thus, the study indicates that queer subjects are subjected to double marginalisation or dual displacement in foreign lands citing both immigrant status and sexual identity. An excerpt from *No Other World* (2017) is given below:

> As soon as his father left, Kiran continued to do everything he could to avoid all Indians. Whether they were new immigrants ("fobs," Kiran called them, "Fresh Off the Boat" like the boy on his hall, like Kiran's own father had been thirty years earlier) or second generation Indian Americans (like Kiran himself), Kiran wanted nothing to do with any of them. To someone else, someone like Kiran's father, Kiran's actions might have seemed harsh and exclusionary, evidence even of some internalized racism... For him, his actions were self- preservationist, preemptive. The reasons Kiran wanted nothing to do with these Indians was because he believed... that if they knew him, really *knew* him, they would want nothing to do with him (129).

Therefore, the idea of home and belongingness in queer diaspora narratives is often in flux. The fluid sexuality is a hindrance to Kiran and Ritwik, alienating them from the process of

assimilation into diasporic community spaces, i.e., a part of the "collective we" as Fortier points out.

Similar to the representation of Little India or community spaces, Kunal Mukherjee provides a queer alternative to the idea of home in his *My Magical Palace*. The protagonist Rahul and his partner Andrew, a young American, recreate the idea of home space as a replica of the heteronormative domestic spaces. Mukherjee explores how the physical structure- a comfortable living space- , emotional intimacy, sense of belonging, and partnership co-exist in an ideal notion of queer home space. Migration provides an excellent platform for the protagonist to explore his sexuality and successfully establish a comfortable home. The novel ends with a positive note where he discloses his true identity to his mother over the phone and reveals his plans to stay with his partner. However, the novel does not delve into the issue of racial or national identity in its exploration of immigrant sensibility. Instead, Mukherjee's emphasis on the recreation of home space appears to be a selective narrative technique in depicting queer diasporic reality by prioritising queer sexuality as the subject matter.

From all these various nuances of domestic spaces and dimensions of the idea of home where the sense of belonging is inherently embedded, it can be summarised that gender fluidity problematises the conventional idea of home. The idea of home in queer diasporic narratives is represented as "constantly evolving entities", as observed by Salman Rushdie in his well-known critical essay "Imaginary homeland". The concept of home is constantly in flux as the subjects cross geographical boundaries. Wendy W. Walters observes that "the notion of diaspora can represent a multiple, plurilocal, and constructed locations of home, thus avoiding ideas of fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic exclusivity traditionally implied by the word home" (16). Similarly, Avtar Brah also negates the fixity of home spaces in a diasporic context as she opines that "[t]he

concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" (192–193)". Therefore, the meaning of home in queer diasporic narratives and the definition of queer domesticity cannot be equated with a physical structure, person, community, or nation. Instead, the home space comprises of many gaps, as Lefebvre observes, the body's interaction with other bodies is subjected to various external factors including cultural apparatuses, ethnicity, racial identity, and gender norms. The sense of belonging in queer diaspora narratives extends beyond conventional home spaces, is channelled through various creative and political means, and manifests in both academic and informal spaces. Thus, academic and informal spaces are examined as "the new terrains of belonging" (Fortier, 414), that reflect "the lived experience of locality" (Brah, 192) in the queer diasporic context.

4.4: The Representation of Academic Spaces in Queer Discourse and Visibility

Minal Hajratwala and Farzana Doctor focus on the significance of academic institutions in producing and representing queer safe spaces. They depict the lived experiences of queer subjects in educational institutions in their respective works. Queer migrant students like Fatima Khan in *Six Meters of Pavement* and Minal Hajratwala [as she narrates her own experiences in *Leaving India*] make use of academic spaces as a platform for self-exploration and the development of sexual identity. The process of queer community building in academic spaces in the West was influenced by the Stonewall riots[13] in 1969, which instigated intellectuals and laymen to be vocal about queer rights. The significance of the annual celebration of the gay pride

[13] The Stonewall riots, also known as Stonewall uprising or rebellion, marked the first public resistance movement by the gay community members that took place in the city of New York, as an immediate response to the police brutality on gay community followed by raid in the gay club and consequent arrest of the queer members in the neighborhood of Greenwich, on 27 June 1969.

march that commemorates the Stonewall riots is represented by Doctor and Hajratwala. The characters' participation in the pride march reflects the potential of academic spaces in normalising the fluidity of sexual identities. The writers reassert the significance of socio-political movements that uphold the rights of gender minorities in academic discourse.

Academic institutions provided a welcoming atmosphere to Fatima and Hajratwala, contrary to their experiences in home spaces and diasporic community spaces. The queer communities in the academic spaces can be seen as crucial agents in empowering the vulnerable queer subjects who were previously subjected to bullying, stigmatisation, and victimisation. Her academic surroundings facilitate Hajratwala's mental transition from confusion and self-doubt to acceptance. She transformed herself into an active lesbian feminist-activist from a self-doubting "brown- bodied" immigrant at Stanford University. She explored her sexual desires, accepted her "true self" by understanding the intricacies of queer existence, started writing as a mode of resistance and actively participated in "Queer Nation meetings" and gay pride parades.

Community spaces in academic institutions facilitate the reiteration of the theory of social constructivism. As explained by the critic Sherwood Thompson:

> Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge and related phenomena relevant to human development that takes the view that knowledge is constructed by social interactions and the terms upon which social interaction takes place… Social constructivism posits that human beings learn this knowledge through a process of socialization, and in strict interpretation takes the position that knowledge is just one type of cultural artifact (668).

Thompson identifies the following four aspects as the critical components of social constructivism[14]. He says that social constructivism primarily requires an understanding of knowledge that is considered as "taken for granted". He establishes the significance of challenging and questioning socially accepted norms. He elaborates on the revision of dominant ideologies. Secondly, he weighs on the nature of knowledge production. The historical and cultural values of knowledge production, he says, also assert the fact that the meaning of knowledge varies in different cultural contexts. He further explains how socio-cultural and linguistic interactions are decisive in the production and meaning of the knowledge system. Finally, he focuses on the significance of human intervention in the process of production of knowledge. Thompson's ideas on social constructivism can be extended to queer diasporic context by emphasising the production and subversion of knowledge/ notions with reference to gender and sexuality.

Academic spaces play a decisive role in the subversion of heteronormative gender roles by encouraging queer community organisations to establish a gender-fluid and queer safe atmosphere regarding intellectual and social interactions in the queer discourse. Such community spaces in academic institutions provide a safe haven for queer subjects who have undergone bullying and stigmatisation in mainstream society. Queer academic spaces, as Thompson observes, challenge the normative framework of gender and sexuality. It allows the community members to explore their fluid sexual identities while creating queer safe academic spaces.

[14] Source: Commentary on social constructivism published on the website, New Discourses, accessed on 02/12/2019.
https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-social-constructivism/

Avtar Brah, a well-known British sociologist and pioneer of diaspora studies, has examined the significance of community organisations in academic institutions in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996). She observes that:

> The organizing activities of Asian women take a variety of forms… The groups range from religious organisations to collectives of feminists. Whatever their political perspective, these groups seek to develop supportive networks for one another, organize social and cultural activities, provide information and advice… and offer space to women to organize and campaign on issues they see as relevant. These self-help groups speak to the shared experience of Asian women and address issues of common concern in an atmosphere of trust and self- respect (82).

Brah explains the intersectional aspects that need to be taken into consideration in the formation of community organisations. Brah focuses on the Foucauldian principle of power and resistance in her work. She observed that such community organisations could initiate radical social changes. Unlike conventional modus operandi of political organisations within academic discourse, she advocates the co-operation and harmony among migrant communities and feminist organisations as "the multi-faceted nature of our oppression demands resistance at so many different levels that such labels become quite problematic" (82).

It can be observed that queer collectives in academic discourse work as a political and cultural tool in building networks. Such community organisations encourage social visibility by providing a platform to subjects in the closet for various reasons, ranging from family rejection to social scrutiny. Hajratwala narrates the personal experiences of overcoming anxiety and

confusion in terms of sexuality by exposing herself to the queer organisation in Stanford as she says "to understand myself better, I started going to a support group for lesbian, bisexual, and questioning women, led by the student health clinic's first openly lesbian therapist" (325). Her interactions with the group members therapeutically assisted her to break out of the "thick brick wall", a metaphoric illustration of self defensive mechanism resulted from constant racial bullying and psychological dilemma of being sexually "different" that she had to undergo. She also observes that the sense of togetherness and belonging that she experienced in the community was also resulted from racial inclusivity. She says that the "community at Stanford had seemed racially mixed, with women of color as strong and visible leaders" (327).

Hajratwala advocates that the community network in educational institutions can address the mental health wellbeing of queer subjects and ultimately safeguard many from "suicide, religious chastity, a lifetime of silence, or a subterranean and hidden sex life" (328). Radical queer politics remained appealing to her as it paved the way for self actualisation even though she was ostracised from her extended family members for revealing her sexual identity. She organised workshops, discussions, and conferences to educate and sensitise the student community about gender fluidity. Apart from narrating her experience of being taken to a gynecologist by her mother for getting "tested [her] for hormonal abnormalities to see if [her] sexual orientation could be cured by modern medicine" (333), Hajratwala also shares the details of various queer South Asian conferences that witnessed emotional "sessions on coming- out to parents". Double displacement, identity crisis, and mental health issues were addressed in such gatherings. According to Hajratwala:

> But the main purpose of our gatherings was often affirmations: to tell ourselves, against all assertions to the contrary, that we could be both Indian and lesbian, both

> Pakistani and gay, both Bangladeshi and bisexual; that we were neither traitors nor deviants nor heretics but merely humans trying to love. Among these peers, some of whom became close friends, I felt that perhaps I had found my own people- my home (335).

The emotional intimacy among community members is also explored in *Six Meters of Pavement*. Fatima and her "non-conformist" friends share the bond that helped her survive despite her parents' decision to disown her upon disclosing her sexual identity. Her parents were scandalised when Fatima joined gay youth groups. Bisexuality was looked upon as a psychological disorder by her conservative family members. The conservative morals in her parents tried to "straighten up" her by asking her to "stop being queer" (198). The future they have envisioned for their daughter, as Fatima says, was structured around "medical school, a marriage to a nice boy, and a couple of children when she was ready… They could set aside their public shame, paint it as a brief, youthful deviation caused by 'bad influences'" (198). However, Fatima's idea of a "good life" varied from that of her parents and she decided to seek comfort in queer community groups. She explored her sexuality and actively participated in queer political movements without jeopardising her commitment to studies.

Both Doctor and Hajratwala provide a descriptive account of pride march and their participation in pride day events in their respective works. Pride parades are the most exuberant mode of resistance by queer community members, which is often criticised as an exaggerated form of sexual expression in heteronormative societies. With reference to the increasing violence and homophobic attacks in recent years, ILGA[15] Europe published a *Framing Equality Toolkit* (2006) for the general public as an attempt to educate and spread awareness against homophobia

[15] International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association.(ILGA)

and transphobia by upholding the notion of sustainable change. An excerpt from the booklet is given below:

> Pride events not only bring LGBT people together to for a public identity and to build a visible community in a difficult social context, but they also allow individuals to express this identity and provide hope for people who are still living in fear. Thus Pride events- the "coming out" of the community as a whole- are essential for the development and well being both of the community and its individual members (10).

Thus, pride is an integral part of queer identity politics. Pride can be looked upon as an action-oriented systemic mechanism that follows the Foucauldian principle of power and resistance[16]to fight against oppression and discrimination. The pride parades can be empowering to the community members as they claim public visibility through resistance against homophobia. At the age of nineteen, Minal Hajratwala "went to [her] first grown up Queer Nation meeting and marched in [her] first gay parade, shouting slogans "We're here, We're queer, get used to it" and "Out, Loud, and Proud" (327). Pride parades are historical attempts to normalise gender fluidity and alternate sexuality in gender discourse by claiming access to the public space.

As second-generation migrants, both Fatima and Hajratwala had to constantly negotiate with the values and morals of their conservative parents. Doctor observes that diasporic consciousness in Fatima's parents "made them hold on to family honour, where keeping up appearances is very important… [Coming out] can mean losing your place in the community" (180). They even considered seeking psychological assistance as a stereotype, for "They think

[16] "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978, p. 95)

counseling is for crazy people" (181). Similarly, Hajratwala critically examines the generation gap among diaspora communities by saying that her parents' notion of happiness is an amalgamation of "outward assimilation and material success in America, inward Indianness and a hewing to tradition in private life" (332). Fatima and Hajratwala were forced to proceed with marriage proposals from "suitable Indian boys" despite disclosing their sexual preferences.

Consequently, the duality of identity is a central theme in both *Six Meters of Pavement* and *Leaving India*, resulting from the two generations' conflicting ideologies regarding diasporic consciousness and sexuality. Access to quality education in queer friendly institutions remains the primary factor that encouraged Fatima and Hajratwala to embrace their true identity. Hajratwala deliberates that "I had seen a therapist at the student health center, who assured me I was normal; taken almost enough feminist studies classes for a minor; and helped found a feminist literary journal and our university's tame version of the radical organisation Queer Nation"(326).

Simultaneously, Fatima and Hajratwala turned to writing as a primary method of expressing their sexual identity. Fatima's article in the university journal *The Varsity* titled as "Beyond Bisexual: a Queer Girl's Take on LGBT" discussing the fluidity of sexuality and the limitations of the gender binary on notions of sexual orientations (166), can be seen as a life changing event for it negatively affected her relationship with family. However, she proudly embraced the writing experience, which empowered her. She seeks solace in creative writing classes amidst the hostile reactions from her family after coming out. Her passion for writing finally led her to give up on medicine, and "she switched her major to English and Creative Writing, realizing that writing wasn't going to be just a hobby for her" (360).

On the other hand, Hajratwala recognised the potential of writing as a powerful political tool in sensitising the mainstream about gender fluidity from the beginning. She became a student journalist at the *Stanford Daily* and receives summer internship opportunities at *Time Magazine* in New York. To Fatima and Hajratwala, writing is not only a medium of self-expression, but a potential mechanism to educate and sensitise the readers on sexual inequality.

Academic spaces facilitated freedom of articulation and expression to queer subjects like Fatima and Hajratwala. However, homophobia and stereotyping in educational institutions are also a part of the lived experience in the west. A study conducted by Daniel Nathan Glassmann titled as *Queer(ing) Spaces: A Critical Analysis of Physical and Virtual Safe Spaces for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Students* explores the sociological and psychological dynamics of queer safe spaces among college students through a sample study. He observed that

> When considering the experiences of safe spaces shared by the White, gay men in this study, as well as my own experiences, I believe that safe spaces may be a way of creating a privileged space for specific identities. Considering the privilege that White, gay men already have due to their race and gender, safe spaces for sexual identities may become places of empowerment for that population and continued marginalization and oppression for lesbian and bisexual women, as well as people of color. When sexual identity becomes the sole focus of safe spaces, other identities become silenced and unacknowledged for all those who occupy these spaces (164).

The question of race often intersects with the organisational harmony in the context of queer diaspora narratives. Unlike Farzana Doctor and Minal Hajratwala, the depiction of the unsafe

queer spatiality in an educational institution is explored in Rahul Mehta's *No Other World*. As Donald E Hall observes, "identity became even more political as individuals banded together in organisations- small and large, highly public, and sometimes very secretive- to explore their commonalities, discuss their common experiences of injustice, and strategize to change oppressive laws, policies, and social perceptions" (36). Consequently, the political identity of a queer migrant can also have an oppressing dynamic where the "difference" is highlighted. Unlike Fatima and Hajratwala, who uphold the notion of visibility and resistance, the character Kiran in *No Other World* isolates himself from the mainstream. He struggles to come out of the closet as he is affected by racial bullying and fear of public scrutiny from fellow Indians in college and family. He keeps himself away from public platforms even though he explores his sexuality privately. Kiran finds the camaraderie of fellow white men comforting as an assimilated second-generation migrant. "To someone else... Kiran's actions might have seemed harsh and exclusionary, evidence even of some internalized racism, and they might have been right, though that's not how Kiran saw it" (Mehta, 129). The stigma and stereotypes in the diasporic community towards sexual minorities made him realise that he is a "misfit" among them. The author says that Kiran's actions were "self- preservationist, preemptive. The reason that Kiran wanted to do nothing with these Indians was because he believed… that if they knew him, really knew him, they would want nothing to do with him" (129).

Apart from race, the question of class privilege and psychological trauma can also act as barriers to the free expression of sexuality. As Glassmann emphasises:

> Safe and unsafe spaces do play a role in how identities are displayed and developed for … LGB college students. Whether physical, virtual, or psychological locations, participants found safe spaces to be affirming and

> supportive of sexual identity expression. Within safe spaces and with safe people, participants shared stories of learning, growing, accepting, and expressing their sexual identities. Participants often spoke about the difference between their conversations in a safe space and conversations in other spaces. Within these safe spaces, participants more freely discussed topics of religion, politics, and sexuality (166).

The character of Ritwik in *A Life Apart* is also portrayed as a queer subject who is insecure about disclosing his sexual identity in college. Unlike Fatima and Hijratwala, who encourage community members to strive for radical social changes and envision blurring of gender binaries through visibility, Ritwik chooses to remain in the closet. However, the authors reassert that it cannot be denied that queer subjects embraced the welcoming possibilities offered within academic spaces. The character of Ritwik explores how educational institutions can have a hostile environment where queer subjects feel unsafe. On the other hand, the portrayal of Fatima and the autobiographical account of Minal reassert the significance of academic institutions in bringing radical social changes. Furthermore, these characters seek validation, comfort, and sense of belonging in other informal gatherings. Public spaces like nightclubs, gay pubs, and dance bars represent a significant alternate dynamic of queer cultural history where the sidelined queer subjects often explore their sexuality.

4.5: Locations of Informal Queer Gatherings: An Exploration of the Popular Culture of Gay Nightlife

As discussed in the previous section, pride parades are significant manifestations of resistance and visibility. Queer gatherings - be it formal or informal, organised or unorganised,

political or apolitical, and legal or illegal- are crucial in the making of queer public culture. Places like gay bars, dance clubs, musical clubs, night clubs, and drag stages contribute the discourse of queer public culture. In *Production of Space*, Lefebvre observes:

> Visual space in its specificity contains an immense crowd, veritable hordes of objects, things, bodies. These differ by virtue of their place and that place's local peculiarities, as also by virtue of their relationship with 'subjects'. Everywhere, there are privileged objects which arouse a particular expectation of interest (209).

Night clubs and gay bars located in the city spaces are depicted as an integral part of queer subjectivity in the context of queer diaspora narratives. These informal urban dwellings play a decisive role in queer visibility. Such spaces are often commercialised wherein the notion of sexual difference is marketed towards profitability. For instance, clubs where drag performances take place gradually form a cluster of commercial institutions around it to cater various needs of its customers, ranging from peculiar costumes, sex toys, print and digital materials that are often sexually explicit/ pornographic in nature, and even late night food carts. Citing the work of Chasis, critic F Stella observed that "from the very beginning of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, a strong link was forged between political activism, the "gay scene" and a specialised market, as participation in the community revolved around activities such as 'attending house parties, drag balls, bath houses, bars, buying physique magazines and/or reading certain literature" (9). Farzana Doctor explores the 'party culture' among queer teenagers through the character of Fatima in *Six Meters of Pavement*. Fatima conducts various fund raising events to support queer informal gatherings, named as "titti parties". Such gatherings and spaces can be looked upon as manifestations of queer cosmopolitanism. Queer cosmopolitanism envision an egalitarian social structure in which socio- cultural, political, and gender differences are

celebrated upholding the principle of equality. These informal spaces are welcoming towards subjects who are openly queer and those who still remain in the closet. Often subjected to social surveillance and scrutiny on a regular basis, queer subjects develop an emotional attachment and sense of belonging by identifying as a member of what Jack Halberstam termed as "queer counter public". Similar to the impact of rap and jazz music culture in the Black liberation movement, gay pubs and clubs resort to music as a powerful medium for the celebration of alternate sexual identity. The cultural significance of music in queer history is reflected in queer diaspora narratives. However, the conflicting imagery of musical preferences among queer migrants is explored in *The Exile*. As a migrant, Atif realises that his Indian origin play a significant role in shaping his taste in music. The loud music in gay pubs makes him conscious of his "difference". Dhalla narrates; "typical music blared from the speakers around them but louder still, in Atif's mind, were the razor- sharp riffs of Abida Parvin, other ghazals, the sound of the sarod in his head… Together they gathered force within him, their melodies alternating back and forth in an aching medley, until he thought he would lose consciousness" (187). The conflicting choice of music in this instance is beyond the conventional subjective attribution of nostalgia to diaspora. The pubs and clubs are presented as inclusive spaces where queer subjects from different socio- cultural backgrounds search for a sense of belonging despite the "differences". The notion of in-between-ness rooted in the conscience of being "different" as a migrant and gay is depicted in this example. On the other hand, writers like Neel Mukherjee represents how some queer characters embrace these informal spaces despite the differences as they thrive for belongingness. "There are the beginnings of a fraternity here among some of the regulars, of whom Ritwik has become one… it's not solidarity or anything, just a flickering registration of the commonality that brings them together underground" (Mukherjee, 123).

Similarly, writers like Farzana Doctor and Kunal Mukherjee explore how queer subjects fall back on night clubs and bars for emotional and physical fulfillment. In his essay "Out There: The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City", Martin F Manalasanan suggests that:

> What is considered to be the quintessential gay space — the gay bar. It is the most prominent space for socialization and, for many, authentic belonging to the community. Going clubbing or bar hopping is one of the typical preoccupations of many gay men. In fact, one way to differentiate oneself from the rest of the gay population is to declare that one is not into the bar scene. The New York City gay bar is epitomized in works of fiction, cinema, poetry, and other cultural forms (70).

The elaborate account of dating, expression of intimacy, and sexual act that take place in these public spaces are depicted in the works of Kunal Mukherjee, Doctor, and Dhalla. Sexually explicit narratives of queer writers are often criticised as obscene and scandalising by the mainstream reading community. Sexual gratification in public places like pubs, clubs and bars can result in homophobic attacks and violence, especially in moralistic heteronormative societies. However, these pictorial illustrations of sexual acts in queer narratives attempt to normalise queer desire with erotic linguistic undertones or sensual language. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner propose the concept of "queer counter public" in order to reexamine the idea of intimacy. They observe that, "Queer culture has learned not only how to sexualize …relations, but also to use them as context for witnessing intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation."(171). Unlike heteronormative notion of intimacy, which they argue, is highly privatised and secured in the institution of marriage, queer discourse represent a fluid substantiation of sexual desire. Berlant and Warner argue that the

notion of intimacy needs to be "recontextualised" in the queer discourse. Therefore, gay pubs, clubs, and bars often presented as platforms that envision and propagate the blurring of boundary between public and private in terms of desire and intimacy.

These informal spaces of gatherings, however, do not function at an egalitarian framework in reality. Racism operates as a differential mechanism in the context of queer diaspora narratives. The subjects are often reminded of their "differences" even within the systems established to celebrate those "differences". Though night clubs and gay bars are looked upon as spaces that promote inclusivity in terms of gender and sexuality, racial and ethnic minority identities are excluded and victimised from the spectrum. Reflecting on the concept on the intimate connection between racial and sexual "otherness'" by Bhabha, Avtar Brah explores the construction of the "other" with reference to racial identity in *Cartographies of Diaspora*. Brah observes:

> While radicalized encounters have certainly been predicated against a history of exploitation, inferiorisation, and exclusion, they have equally inhabited spaces of deep ambivalence, admiration, envy and desire. Desire for the racialised 'Other' is constructed and codified in and through patriarchal regimes of power, even as heterosexual cultural norms, values and conventions are continually disrupted by lesbian, gay, and other sexualities. At the same time all sexualities in a racialised context are inscribed by racialised matrices of power. In other words, the 'Other' of racism is not an unequivocal obverse of 'self'; 'otherness' may be constructed primarily, but not exclusively, in antithetical terms (155).

Brah emphasises that in the context of diaspora, instances of racism can be reflected on various social practices ranging from verbal bullying to physical attacks. As Neel Mukherjee presents through the character of Ritwik, informal spaces of queer gathering assert that the politics of the body is an evident discriminatory parameter in the diaspora. Martin F Manalansan, a well-known Filipino anthropologist and professor of Asian American Studies, has extensively studied the discriminatory mechanisms in the city of New York. Manalansan uses the term "gay mecca" to denote the city of New York, as many of the queer community members consider it as the "global queer capital". "The mapping of gay New York City is not only about the physical layout of the queer landscape but is also about hierarchical and uneven spatialized imaginings where particular queers are socially and symbolically located" (Manalansan, 65). His study on Filipino gay members revealed that the "gay mecca" is considered the ideal location for sexual and financial opportunities. New York City, he says, is often looked upon "as a unique milieu in which to create a gay sense of self". However, these spaces are highly racialised in its nature and are discriminatory toward immigrants, people of color, and women. "Despite the camaraderie, fun, and pleasure that can be found in these spaces…these same spaces were sites of alienation and exclusion" (Manalansan, 82).

Queer migrants are constantly reminded of their "innate difference" in spaces of informal gatherings. An Excerpt from *A Life Apart* is given below:

> Ritwik also realizes, in slow stages, that his is a type of minority appeal, catering to the 'special interest' group rather than the mainstream, because of his nationality, looks, skin colour. He keeps pushing the word 'race' away. The mainstream is blond, white, young, slim. Or, more accurately, that is the desired

> mainstream. He doesn't satisfy the crucial first two although the last two can influence the swing cruisers (124).

Mukherjee uses the phrase "Logic of the meat market" (122) to denote the discriminatory approaches in nightclubs. Certain slang words are also commonly used among visitors that project the politics of the body. Mukherjee emphasises the common usage of classificatory lingo in pubs and clubs that are divisive. The term "rice queens" is used to refer to men who fancy oriental guys. Similarly, the term "potato queens" refers to men who prefer white British men. The racial undertone in such categorisation also depicts the notion of "ideal" or desired body in the queer context. As Manalasanan observes:

> Gay men, according to popular, stereotypical lore, are bearers of "good taste," but the specifics of what constitutes "good taste" and who are its arbiters vary widely despite its heavy class underpinnings. Good taste, therefore, despite its material manifestations from furniture and art to houses and clothes, is naturalized in many ways as an intrinsic part of being gay. I would suggest that class is always sublimated in most gay discourses and subsumed not only under the cloak of good taste but also under a rhetoric of same-sex desire and the image of the valorized (white) gym-buffed body (68).

Manalasanan probes into the dichotomy of the orient- occident and feminine-masculine distinctions in the context of gay bars. He observes that the notion of the ideal body is at par with the image of a "macho-man". He elaborates that Asians are generally considered docile feminine beings and, therefore, less preferred as an object of desire. After conducting an anthropological study, Manalansan argues that Asian bodies are often rejected during the "queer surfing in the

alley"[17]. Class is an essential parameter of identity that is decisive in the accessibility of queer spaces like gay bars. Gay bars are not always welcoming to underprivileged people of alternate sexuality as it is highly commercialised and racialised spaces. As an aftermath of this economic disparity in accessing the queer spaces, the alleys often consist of irregulated and illegal pockets that endorse prostitution, unsafe public sex, and/or drug trafficking. The pictorial illustration of downtowns and sex in public toilet cubicles, as depicted in *A Life Apart*, represents the significance of class in the production of queer spaces. Ritwik becomes an undocumented/illegal immigrant as his student visa gets expired. He seeks shelter with an old English woman by spending his days as a caretaker. However, he is forced into prostitution in downtown as his financial status becomes a barrier in accessing queer public spaces. He constantly feared "unprotected gang rape, torture, mutilation, death, another statistic found by a dirty canal path in London" (328), even though he seeks comfort in such 'dark and shady' spaces for sexual gratification. Mukherjee depicts a series of violent incidents of sexual abuse that Ritwik undergoes in downtown. Ritwik was tortured, humiliated, and physically scarred during his desperate pursuit of sexual gratification. He was threatened by middlemen/ "pimps" on multiple occasions and even narrowly escaped an acid attack once. The violence and abuse that Ritwik encountered were primarily due to his skin colour. Ritwik struggled to negotiate with the challenges in the "meat market" for his economic and racial status attributed to the label of being "inherently different".

The notion of violence and abuse is not limited to the physical manifestations in the context of queer diaspora narratives. Manalansan explores the impact of structural violence on queer subjectivity in his essay "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global

[17]The "alley" is actually a stretch of several blocks right around a string of gay bars on Roosevelt Avenue and is known to be a major area for queer cruising and public sex ("Out There, Manalansan, 80)

City". He observes that "one popular narrative about the transformation of the streets in the past five to ten years is through what most informants term as a "cleaning up," not in the sense of physical hygiene but in terms of routing out queer public-sex spaces" (145). Queer immigrants of colour are more vulnerable to the regular police raids in the alleys. "Being a person of color added to the danger of being arrested…the dangers for immigrant queers of color multiplied as intense policing (Manalansan, 81). He further expands the notion of structural violence;

> there is a collective acknowledgment of how these queers of color who are neither South Asian nor Middle Eastern are not free from profiling, from the racist and racializing practices of state authorities, and how they are, to some extent, in the same predicament.(147)…While these narratives of fear and of structural violence need not involve actual physical violence, reports of increased frequency of actual beatings, harassments, and assaults of queers of color actually amplify the urgency of these stories. I submit that physical violence is a more overt manifestation of structural violence. (152)

Racial profiling by the governing bodies under the pretext of safety and legality implies the multilayered structure of discrimination. Therefore, a utopian vision of queer public culture concerning the spaces like gay bars and pubs denote an alternate reality for queer immigrants. The process of "othering" is deep rooted in the mainstream conscience and within systemic bodies. Thus, the lived reality of discrimination, oppression, and violence towards the queer of colour, represents the negotiations by queer subjects in host countries. More than as spaces of resistance, these spaces act as spaces of constant negotiations to the queer migrants.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

In recent years, contemporary diaspora writers of Indian origin have begun to explore the concept of sexuality and the formation of gender identity. Expanding its nuances from the scope of feminism, contemporary diaspora writers have explored sexuality. Therefore, it is necessary to consider LGBTQ studies or queer narratives as an emerging field of studies in literary criticism. The dissertation attempts to trace some of the significant challenges that queer subjects negotiate during their transnational journey probing through the literary works of Rahul Mehta, Neel Mukherjee, Kunal Mukherjee, Farzana Doctor, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, and Minal Hajratwala.

The dissertation primarily addresses five research questions proposed in the beginning of the research, viz,

1) How is the process of queer-diaspora identity formation depicted in the select literary texts?
2) How does intersectionality affect the diasporic experiences of queer subjects?
3) Is diaspora presented as an escape mechanism from homophobia by queer writers?
4) How do the politics of queer body and representation of queer trauma act as the decisive factors in the production of queer spaces?
5) How do literary representations contribute to the changing structure of public-private distinction regarding the production of queer-inclusive spaces?

5.1: Research Findings

The construction of the postcolonial "other" in the context of diaspora writings takes a different turn as gender dynamics is introduced to the framework. Using Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, it was analysed that diaspora/migration cannot be an escape mechanism. A utopian vision of the host land devoid of any traits of homophobia is not presented as the ultimate reality in the select narratives. The study explores how the queer subjects must constantly negotiate with various socio-cultural and political differences that shatter their dreams of a utopian host land. However, writers like Minal Hajratwala and Farzana Doctor emphasise the drastic difference in the public's attitude towards gender minorities in the Indian subcontinent and host nations in the west. Despite the struggles put forward by their ethnic identity, these writers acknowledge the possibilities of self-actualization that migration facilitates for queer subjects. Hajratwala and Doctor acknowledge the existence of queer-inclusive spaces in the west, even though such spaces are limited. On the other hand, writers like Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, Rahul Mehta, Kunal Mukherjee, and Neel Mukherjee reflect on the implications of "Indianness" in diasporic contexts that affect the journey of the characters towards sexual freedom. Despite the different approaches, queer diasporic writers re-assert the notion of double alienation in the context of queer diaspora experiences.

The research examines the production of queer spaces by focusing on aspects like body's politics, representation of trauma, personal and collective/ cultural memories, identity markers, the significance of literary devices like symbols and images, role of class, religion, and race. The role of these factors in shaping queer spaces and the process of identity formation from an intersectional point of view is explored in this dissertation.

The introduction of the dissertation provides a detailed background account of diaspora literature and queer studies. After an extensive literature review, the chapter identifies the research gap in existing scholarship in the context of gender representations in diaspora literature. It is argued that a significant study on gender representations in Indian diasporic fiction is yet to be attempted, whereas similar studies are available in various other cultural contexts. The existence of prominent critical studies on the Black queer diaspora and sociological studies on the Philippines' queer diaspora are duly acknowledged. However, available critical studies on South Asian diaspora writers often limit their scope to famous writers like Shyam Selvadurai and Shani Mootoo. Therefore, the dissertation attempts to serve as an extension of the critique by critically engaging with the contemporary queer diasporic narratives produced by the writers of Indian origin.

The transformation of the queer body in the context of diaspora is mapped through an analysis of the literary texts in the chapter titled "Representation of the Queer Body: Reading the Contemporary Diasporic Narratives". Similar to the plot development structures in the primary texts, this chapter follows a linear approach to exploring the process of queer identity formation. The queer body reflects multiple modes of negotiations with mainstream ideologies spanning from early childhood to migration. As the postcolonial notion of "other" is explored concerning the queer body, this chapter examines different layers of identity formation. Borrowing Lee Edelman's theoretical construction of the figure of "the child", the interrelation between the formation of sexual identity and childhood has been established in this chapter.

. The role of parental intervention and social institutions like family and school in shaping and reaffirming gender binarism is discussed in detail. Homophobic instances from the texts have been used to elaborate on Sedgwick's idea of "the formation of the closet" and "coming

out" through the analysis of the queer body's interactions with homosexual and heterosexual counterparts. A detailed analysis of cross-dressing and other bodily modifications is also attempted in this chapter by emphasising the idea of "male femaling" proposed by Richard Ekins. The notion of hyper-femininity concerning the hijra community in Indian subcontinent is also examined in order to understand various nuances of cross-dressing.

Further, it can be looked upon as a celebration of sexuality or as a mode of resistance by making a powerful political statement to ensure "visibility" in the public spaces. The last section of this chapter, titled migrant bodies, analyses the role of factors like race, class, and religion in identity formation in the context of migration narratives regarding intersectionality. Thus, this chapter attempts to locate the queer body in the postcolonial framework of the "Other" notion by mapping out the structural parameters of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and homosexuality.

The discussion on the construction of postcolonial "Other" is further explored in the next chapter titled "Queer diasporic trauma: An analysis of the use of memory, dreams, and symbols as literary devices". As the title indicates, this chapter outlines the significance of addressing the psychological impact of the process of "Othering". The chapter explores the possibilities of documenting traumatic personal memory in forming collective memory and queer public culture as represented in the texts. The debate on the public-private discourse is also studied. The constant occurrences of dreams and nightmares are another significant aspect that the writers have effectively used to suggest the notion of trauma among gender minorities in these narratives.

Similarly, the authors employ certain symbols and imageries to represent the immigrant sensibility. However, these symbols are not merely presented as representations of nostalgia for

the homeland but rather tools in defining both personal and cultural memory. This chapter also addresses the significance of specific animal imageries as an important literary device that the contemporary queer diaspora writers have incorporated in their attempt to represent the notion of trauma, especially with reference to repressed sexuality and the manifestation of sexual desires.

The representation of queer trauma and the politics of queer body can be identified as two major components that shape and affect the process of "Othering". Discriminatory social responses and internal dilemmas induce these two components among queer migrant subjects. This necessitated the production of distinct queer safe spaces, and resulted in negotiations in host country's private and public spaces. The chapter titled "The Production of Queer Spaces: A Critical Enquiry into the Spaces of Belonging "explores how queer spaces recontextualises the notion of space in diaspora writing. The chapter addresses the significance of literature in the documentation of queer history. The role of personal archives and narratives in developing the collective cultural memory of gender minorities is explored in detail. Under the subtitle "Home and the sense of belonging: A paradigm shift from nostalgia to identity crisis", a detailed account of understanding spaces of belonging is discussed. The chapter outlines how the thematic focus shifts from the nostalgic revival of the past, pull of home, and homeland to the search for identity in queer diaspora narratives. The chapter focuses on the instances from texts that show the hierarchisation of gender roles in domestic spaces.

Similarly, the representation of academic spaces and locations of informal queer gatherings, such as gay bars, dance floors, and pubs are also considered while attempting a political probe into the queer discourse. With reference to Lefebvre's idea of spatial triad and Thompson's theory of social constructivism, the chapter establishes how formal and informal spaces in the context of queer diaspora become spaces of resistance. The chapter also reflects the

constant negotiations the queer migrants are expected to make towards their survival. The "othering" process is deeply rooted in the mainstream conscience of the heteronormative and patriarchal society. Therefore, racial bullying, violence, and discrimination narratives need to reach the larger audience. The dissertation concludes with the necessity of re-emphasising the role of literature and academic research in inculcating inclusive values and normalising differences. As the dissertation reinforces the ideology of inclusivity, this research will benefit postcolonial students, academicians working in the field of gender studies and diaspora literature, volunteers of gender causes, human rights associations, and civil body organisations constituted for the welfare of queer people.

5.2: Limitations of the study and further scope for research

Due to the constraints of research methodology, the dissertation could not encapsulate much of the information/data gathered through interaction with queer community members at various stages of the research. As the study is descriptive and focuses on textual analysis with the support of theoretical frameworks, the archives of queer narratives collected through personal interactions could not be included to a great extent. Henceforth, an ethnographical study on the same research area can be identified as a potential scope for further research. During the interactions with queer community members, gaps in the policy-level interventions, especially in implementing the policies, were identified. An exclusive study on the impact of law amendments on community members in India can be attempted for future research. Similarly, the necessity of considering queer people regarding the ongoing political and legal debate on the Supreme Court's proposal to legalize prostitution is identified. Expanding the nuances of gender reservation for educational and employment opportunities can also be considered a potential area of study in future.

Another significant limitation of the research is regarding terminologies and functional definitions. The functional definition of the term queer in the dissertation is limited to the lived experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and hijras. In doing so, the term queer as an umbrella/ collective term in the dissertation suggests selective expressions of gender fluidity. Similarly, the chapter on queer trauma is restricted to the psychological experiences of queer subjects. In the dissertation, the scope of understanding physical trauma in queer context has not been explored beyond sexual abuse. The complexities of sex reassigning surgeries and unscientific castration measures among hijra communities can also come under queer trauma. Trauma stemming from physical violence against sexual minorities can also be considered an area for further research. However, every attempt has been made to address most of the crucial aspects of the research hypothesis.

Glossary

The following terms and their implied meanings are provided as functional definitions to ensure clarity regarding the usage of these terms in the thesis.

1. Queer: Queer is used as a collective/ umbrella term to suggest gender fluidity. The dissertation primarily focuses on the lived experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters, with reference to the primary texts.

2. [18]LGBTQIA+ :An inclusive term / Abbreviation for the following:
    - "Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is sexually and emotionally attracted to other women.
    - Gay: Refers to a man who is sexually and emotionally attracted to other men
    - Bisexual: A person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender.
    - Transgender: A person whose gender identity is different from the gender identity assigned at birth.
    - Queer/ Questioning: Collective term that rejects all other labels/ Questioning refers to those who are figuring out their sexual orientation".
    - Intersex: "This term refers to people who naturally have biological traits, such as hormonal levels or genitalia, which do not match what is typically identified as male or female. There are many different intersex variations. Being intersex is a

[18] Source: The definitions of LGBTQIA+ are taken from the official website of Outright Action International, an International human rights organization. It can be read here: https://outrightinternational.org/content/acronyms-explained

naturally occurring trait in humans; it is not pathological. Being intersex is not linked to sexual orientation or gender identity; intersex people can have different sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions" (OAI, n.p).

- Asexual: "Often referred to as "Ace", this is an umbrella term used for individuals who do not experience, or experience a low level, of sexual desire. This identity can include those who are interested in having romantic relationships, and those who are not. People of different sexual orientations and gender identities can be asexual" (OAI, n.p).
- Ally: "People who identify as cisgender and straight, and believe in social and legal equality for LGBTIQ+ people are allies" (OAI, n.p).

3) Gender Binary: In simple sense, it refers to the concept that men and women are the only genders. However, the term also needs to be understood with reference to biological structure and social roles of the gender.
4) Heteronormativity: Herteronormativity refers to the conviction that only heterosexual orientation is normal, natural and befitting to the society. It also adheres to the binaristic notion of gender in terms of procreation.
5) Homosexuality: Sexual orientation towards the member of one's same gender. Same-sex attraction.
6) Homophobia: Prejudice and strong sense of dislike (often hatred) towards people belonging to minority genders.
7) *Hijra*: A term used to address eunuchs in Indian subcontinent. They can either be intersex people or transgender people.

8) Sex reassigning surgery (Gender Affirmation Surgery): The medical/surgical transition procedure to physically achieve desired sexual identity. It might consist of various medical procedures including vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, scrotoplasty, mammoplasty, laser treatments to regulate hair growth, vocal surgeries, and hormone therapies.

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For IJELLH

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The Role of Government and Non-governmental Organizations in the Integration of Returned Migrants: A Case Study of the State of Kerala, India in the Context of Covid-19

Rameesa P M*

Abstract

The Indian state of Kerala has witnessed a massive inflow of returned migrants during the lockdown in the wake of the ongoing pandemic. Though the official data of international and internal migrants who returned to the state by registering in the online portal of NORKA (The Non Resident Keralites Affairs) is not yet publicized by the concerned authorities,- as the process still continues- it is roughly estimated that the number of returned migrants have reached around 8.5 lakh during the lockdown (Philip, 2021). The changing visa rules of Gulf countries and the impending global economic recession act as major challenges to the state of Kerala, as the uncertainty regarding the migrant inflow and pattern can adversely affect the state economy. This paper is aimed at addressing the initiatives by the government of Kerala towards the integration of returned migrants. The significance of NORKA's direct financial assistance and the 'Dream Kerala Proj-

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ect' announced by the chief minister, as policy level interventions from the government towards the well being of returned migrants is explored in this paper. Similarly, the significance of non- governmental organizations, such as community service groups and youth volunteer initiatives, in the process of integration will be addressed in detail. The paper also examines the long term plans towards structural changes as proposed and implemented by the government, that would e crucial in the process of integration. Therefore, a section of this paper will be allotted to address the policy level interventions that promote start up missions, localization of agriculture sector and small scale industry.

Introduction

The demography of the southern state of Kerala in India represents a significant role that the migrant populations possess in the state economy. The growth in GDP and high per capita income in Kerala are indebted to the remittances of the migrant population. "Kerala saw annual remittances of Rs 85,000 crore in 2018, and was expecting this to increase to Rs 100,000 crore in 2020" (Philip, 2021). Demographically, Kerala stands as an important provider of labor force to the foreign nations, especially Gulf countries, and a significant job market to the migrant workers from different northern Indian states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, and West Bengal. As Kerala can be looked upon as a center of migration cycle, the ongoing pandemic did have a tremendous impact on the economy of the state. As Professor Irudaya Rajan, faculty at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, told *Quartz* during an extensive interview on the impact of lockdown on migration:

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कला एवं धर्म शोध संस्थान, लोक कल्याणकारी ट्रस्ट, वाराणसी

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कला सरोवर

KALA SAROVAR

(भारतीय कला एवं संस्कृति की विशिष्ट शोध पत्रिका)

प्रधान सम्पादक डॉ० प्रेमशंकर द्विवेदी

Vol.-24 No.-2-2021 RNI No. -46269/87 ISSN-0975-4520 वर्ष-24-संख्या-2-2021

Memory, Trauma, and the Representation of Alternate Sexuality: A Study of select Queer Narratives.

★ Rameesa P M

ABSTRACT:

The representation of trauma and memory is an integral part of queer narratives, as heteronormative social structure often conflict with the free expression of alternate sexuality. Traumatic experiences in the form of discrimination, bullying, moral policing, homophobia, and displacement can be identified as common traits in the works of prominent Indian writers like Arundhati Roy and Amruta Patil. The conflict resulted from attempts to 'fit-in' and embracing the essence of one's true sexual identity is the primal focus of this paper. The intricate role of sexuality and gender in the process of identity formation is addressed in detail. The dilemma of queer subjects in negotiating the sexual freedom and social acceptance can be cited as the root cause of the identity crisis and trauma in the context of queer narratives.

I hope to analyse the postcolonial notion of "other" in queer narratives by exploring the power dynamics and hierarchy in Indian society. The question of rural- urban dynamic and the notion of mythological belief system in the queer sensibility, especially in the representation of hijra communities, will be explored in this paper. The paper is also aimed at addressing the notion of home spaces and sense of belonging in the discourse of queer narratives.

KEY WORDS: Queer Narratives, Trauma Studies, Identity Crisis, Gender Fluidity, Homophobia

FULL PAPER:

Queer bodies in heteronormative societies are often looked upon as deviants, and thereby, are subjected to "other" status. The stigmas associated with gender fluidity are deep rooted in the psyche of mainstream society as the notion of masculinity and femininity limits the manifestation of a different body. British anthropologist, Mary Douglas has explained the necessity and importance of symbolic boundary maintenance in her work, *Purity and Danger* (1966). She argued that "taboo is a spontaneous device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe... taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred" (11). Stigmas associated with alternate sexuality often lead the queer subjects to be secretive about their body and sexuality. Coming out in homophobic societies like India, often remains a herculean task, and thereby, forces the queer subjects to project themselves as "normal" in the society by hiding their desire and sexuality. The notion of self is problematised in such instances, where the intricate inner self is victimised and the outer self/ projected self is always under the pressure for social acceptance.

The identity crisis among sexual minorities is explored by renowned Indian writers like Arundhati Roy and Amruta Patil. These three writers explore various dynamics and nuances of queer experiences in their respective works. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) explores the inner turmoil of Anjum , a *hijra* born in a conservative Muslim family who is forced to keep her identity a secret and later decides to break free of family ties to embrace her sexual identity. Though the novel explicitly invoke contemporary political scenario and historic developments of India, Roy's protagonist Anjum stands as one of the prominent queer literary figure that re-imagines the notion of gender binary.Similarly,

★ Ph D Scholar, Department of English, University of Hyderabad.

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Semester I

Sl. No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No. Credits 4	Course No. Credits 2	Course No. Credits 2	Course No. Credits 2	Course No. Credits 4	Course No. Credits 4	Course No. Credits 4	Course No. Credits 2	Course No. Credits 2	Course No. Credits 4
			EN- 801	EN- 802	EN- 821	EN- 823	EN-824	EN- 826	EN- 828	EN-829	EN-830	EN-831
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3	16HEPH03	Rameesa P.M	-	-	-		PASS.	-	-	-	PASS	-
4	16HEPH04	Asima Baral	-	-	PASS	-	-	-	-	-	-	PASS
5	16HEPH05	Md.Samsujjaman	-	-	-	FAIL	-	-	FAIL	-	-	-

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			EN-871	EN-872	EN-873	EN-874	EG-825
1	16HEPH01	BONIFACE GAIGUILUNG KAMEI	PASS	-	-	-	PASS
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3	16HEPH03	RAMEESA PM	-	AB	-	-	-
4	16HEPH04	ASIMA BARAL	-	-	PASS	-	-
5	16HEPH05	MD.SAMSUJJAMAN	-	-	-	PASS	-

Course No.	Title of the Course
EN- 871	Sovereignty and Literature: Readings -4
EN- 872	Revisionong Postcolonialism -4
EN- 873	Introduction to Bengal Dalit Short fiction -4
EN-874	Post –Colonial India in Practice: Society Region and Identity -4
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Month & Year: July, 2017
Semester: II Supplementary

Sl. No	Regd No.	Name of the Student	Course No. Credits-4
			EN-872
1	16HEPH03	Rameesa P.M	PASS

Course No. Title of the Course

EN-872 Revisioning Post colonialism

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5	16HEPH05	MD SAMSUJJAMAN	EN826 PASS					0109	

SubjectCode	SubjectName	Credits
EN821	Literature via Postcolonial Theory	2.00
EN822	Sovereignty and Literature: More Reading	4.00
EN824	On Narrative	4.00
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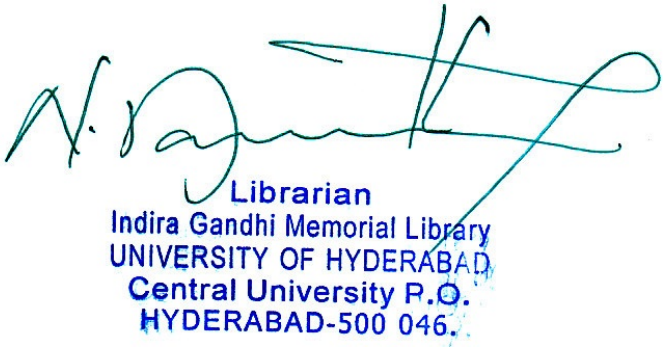
Representation of Queer Spaces:A Study of Select Contemporary Indian Diasporic Fiction

by Rameesa P M



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