



Tapping South-Asian Diaspora Studies: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper investigates the identity issues of South-Asians in the Diaspora. It engages the theoretical and methodological debates concerning processes of culture and identity in the contemporary context of globalization and transnationalism. It analyses the works of South-Asian Diaspora writers tracing out the dynamics of power towards critical alternatives that recognise and value similarities and accommodation of groups and individuals. The themes taken up by these South-Asian Diaspora writers relate to the issues of racism, the experience of displacement, the process of transculturation, the tensions between individuals and so forth. Their writing, in its accounts of immigrant experience and otherness reflects the ambivalences and complexities inherent in the conceptions of the race, class, ethnicity and identity. The present paper taps this journey from ideological construct to identity formation in South-Asian Diaspora Studies. The paper makes an attempt to evolve the essence of cultural Diaspora.

Keywords: South-Asian Diaspora; Immigrants; Transculturation; Cultural Identity

Culture includes ideas, beliefs, values, norms, social practices, symbols and images that define societies and communities in such a way that individuals identify with them, construct meaningful relationships within the cultural boundaries, and relate to other communities and societies through them. Following the Bakhtinian notion of ‘culture as a field of multiple discourses’, James Clifford (2002) explains, “There are no integrated cultural worlds or languages. All attempts to posit such abstract unities are constructs of power. A ‘culture’ is, concretely an open-ended creative dialogue of subcultures, of insiders and outsiders, of diverse factions” (*Predicament*46).

Cultures therefore are not monolithic, hierarchical entities constituted by a pure origin or linearity, but are transmissible through mixing or migration. This migration and dispersion is widely prominent among human beings. Migration does not mean the mere physical movement of people i.e. only geographical rather the migrant’s carry with them a socio-cultural baggage which consists among other things of a predefined social identity, a set of religious beliefs and practices, a framework of norms and values governing monological family and kinship organization, food habits, and language. This facet of migration has important implications for the formation of ethnicity among a migrant community and its relationship with other ethnic groups. The phenomenon surrounding such human migration is best conceptualized under the broad rubric ‘Diasporas’.

Anthropological interpretations give two reasons for cultural change: one, the internal dynamics within a society and second, the introduction of new cultural elements from outside. Internal migration, major socio-political upheavals, and painful processes of colonisation and decolonisation accelerate this intercultural contact. The term, ‘transculturation’ was coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940 to describe the mutual influences of cultures in contact and the new patterns of reality that this process generates. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) remarks that transculturation is a phenomenon of ‘the contact zones’, the social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in asymmetrical relation of dominance and subordination—like colonialism, slavery or their aftermath as they are lived out across the globe today (4). Simply speaking, transculturation is a cross over or mutual exchange between cultures resulting in syncretistic, though uneven transformation of both the cultures.

Globalisation, internal migration and major socio-political upheavals have increased intercultural contact, thus setting a process of adaptation to new circumstances and leading to changes in such phenomenon as behaviour, identity, values and attitudes. How these cultural differences are accepted, denied or interpreted, depends on the relative position of the culture in the cross-cultural contact, whether voluntary or forced, the period of contact, population size of the acculturating group and also the desirability of the cultural qualities of the donor culture by the recipient culture. This transcultural process is an uneven one and does not affect all individuals in the same way.

Since culture cannot be defined objectively and scientifically and is temporal and fluid in nature, cultural representations in the field of literature would also be implicated in the emerging process that is guided by global movements shaped by difference and power. The process of transculturation depends on whether the individual feels marginalised due to host society’s hostile acculturation influences, or pursues integration or assimilation due to his positive or negative attitudes towards cross-cultural encounters, discriminatory policies, and also the relative degree of

social acceptability of his transcultural status. Previous cross-cultural encounters also set the stage for subsequent contacts. Over the years, migratory movements due to fast population growth, uneven economic development and better transportation have resulted in a large-scale emergence of Diasporas. These Diasporas can either be forced or voluntarily having experienced transculturation at various stages due to multiple displacements, not only in their prior cultural contacts but in the host culture too—a process that is an ongoing one and occurring on mutual terms. Originally applied to the Jewish exile and dispersal, the term ‘Diaspora’ in simple terms refer to widely scattered collectivities whose dispersal was either the outcome of major historical upheavals or were due to a desire for upward social or economic mobility. Thus, diasporic thought finds its “apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline *figure* of the exile caught in a historical limbo between home and world” (Gandhi 132). However, despite the valorisation of the “indebtedness” of diasporic figures, it would be wrong to assume that these identities do not have a sense of longing for home and origins. But this “patriotism” as Appa Durai observes, has moved away from a form of “monopatriotism” towards a “complex, nonterritorial, postnational forms of allegiance” (166). Diaspora carries along with them “seeds from the original land that help the people on the move and their descendants to root themselves in the new place” (Kamboureli, *Making* 13). This ‘homeland’ may just be an ideological construct, but crucial for identity formation.

Diasporic identities seem as “confounding territorial and essentialist nationalisms in favour of transnational subjectivities and communities” and are linked with both “local conditions of existence and multilocal ties and connections” (Fortier 32). Diasporas constantly negotiate their position between nations to determine their future course, though concern for roots cannot be undermined.

The term “Diaspora” is also being invoked as a theoretical medium for contesting all claims to essentialised notions of national identity and ethnicity. Gandhi notes that the twin discourses of Diaspora and hybridity, that James Clifford used in his seminal essay “Travelling cultures” (1992) by envisioning European colonialism as a type of migration and Diaspora which relied on a massive movement of European populations and predicated upon a triumphant moment of return, can be reversed to disclose the instability and adulteration of colonial culture and subjectivity (132-3). The concept of immigration writing can be expanded to include diasporic writing that endowed with transcultural aspects, challenges the structures that either treat ethnic collectivities and national narratives in essential terms or dismantle the foundations on which the categories like race or ethnicity rest to elide the power hierarchies. Paul Gilroy remarks that the worth of Diaspora concept is in its “attempt to specify differentiation and identity in a way which enables one to think about the issue of racial commonality outside of constricting binary frameworks—especially those that counterpoise essentialism and pluralism” (120). Gilroy’s idea of Diaspora concept helps to consider South-Asian writing as a unit of analysis that acknowledges significant differences between them, but also does not elide the issue of power and subordination base on race by merely terming it as a social and cultural construction. This definition is quite useful as it allows discerning transcultural features in all ethnicities without ignoring their differences.

Any theory taking ‘South Asia’ as a point of departure has to contend with multiple, often conflictual, histories and futurities. Whilst the heterogeneity of affiliations (and disaffiliations) within and between South-Asian locations, and thus within South-Asian Diasporas, cannot be overemphasised, Diasporas are not simply smaller versions of the places they have left. The *a priori* features of diasporic formations - multi-directional dispersal over great distances, long-residency and a sense of critical mass - indicate that the particular routes taken and the specificities of the way place are lived in, are perhaps more crucial to understanding the characteristics of any Diaspora than a conceptual topography of origins. (Clifford, 1997:250).

Defining the cultural characteristics of a Diaspora requires attention to the typical and distinctive behaviours which propel the formation of the ‘alternate public spheres’ that Clifford, following Gilroy, affirms as a ‘home’ for Diaspora.

[Diaspora] involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home [...] Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. (James Clifford, 1997:251).

It should be noted at the outset that cultural characteristics are always *dynamic*; a set of practices that are always unfinished, continuously changing, consensual at one moment, from one perspective contested at another, from another. For, in its most abstract sense, Diaspora refers to a *process*: a process of identifying elsewhere/outside in order to be here/inside, where being here also shapes the tenor of identifications elsewhere. In Clifford’s view of this process, ‘here’ refers to the sphere of community within the ‘host’ nation-state (which for the second-generation and beyond may mean the place of birth) and ‘elsewhere’ includes prior homelands, Diasporas in other places, and a sense of the world as an inhabited space. In this way, a diasporic ‘sphere’ may become as diminutive as a bubble and as large as the globe.

The range of work completed under the banner of Diaspora studies, or transnational studies or transcultural studies is growing space, supported by conferences, special issues and journals like *Public Culture* and *Diaspora* (Walsh, 2003). Accompanying this growth are two broad, contrary responses to Diaspora theory that should be signaled at the outset and which correspond to the image of a diasporic sphere as either bubble or globe. On the one hand, Diaspora theory has been rebuked for romanticizing discrepant, often painful, experiences of relocation in order to promote a rootless cosmopolitanism as the ‘ideal condition’ to which all should aspire. This strand of critique (Diaspora as globe) is bound up with debates on globalization, misgiving about the utility of ‘happy hybridity’ and the metaphorical use of

'migrancy'. A major concern is that 'nomadic intellectuals' may have constructed a false affinity between their own rarefied 'life ways' and life as lived by the vast majority of migrant peoples. On the other hand, focusing on the word-view of minority communities leaves Diaspora theory susceptible to all the afflictions of a theoretical ghetto; insularity, ethnic reification and essentialism, separatism and so on. The strand of critique (Diaspora as bubble) is linked to a growing suspicion on that 'identity politics' are inadequate to effect wide-ranging social change.

The term 'Diaspora' (from the Greek *diasperio*) was first used from around the 3rd century BCE to refer to Jewish communities exiled from Palestine and settled in other lands (Brazier and Mannur 2003:1). "Diaspora" itself has been widely disseminated in recent times and may now be used to describe the situation of any transnationally displaced community. Nonetheless, the Jewish experience continues to be a paradigmatic point of reference for Diaspora studies. This is partly the result of historical precedence, largely due to the impact of the Holocaust, which remains a most emotive sign of the vulnerability of Diasporas to the excesses of nationalism, and also because of the influence of one particular article. In the *lead* article of the *inaugural* issue of the journal *Diaspora* (drawing attention to moments of academic precedence), William Safran defines the main features of Diaspora and takes the Jewish experience as an 'ideal type'. His schema has been widely reproduced over the years. Clifford summarizes:

[Safran] defines Diasporas as follows: "expatriate minority communities" (1) that are dispersed from an original "centre" to at least two "peripheral" places; (2) that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; (3) that "believe they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host country"; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are "importantly defined" by this continuing relationship with the homeland (1997:247).

Safran places great weight on the role of the homeland as a singular point of origin and centering force in Diaspora: four of his six categories are to do with the Diaspora's attachments and obligations to the homeland. The trajectory of origin, dispersal, restoration and return apparent in Safran's model of Diaspora is clearly linked to the ethos of the Zionist movement (established in 1897) which realized its aims in 1948 with the foundation of the state of Israel. In this way the Jewish Diaspora is *atypical*, in that no other Diaspora has founded a modern nation-state. Yet the desire that Safran speaks of, the futurity of 'eventual' restoration/return, is perhaps a longing experienced by other displaced groups. Certainly, some 'separatist' movements within South Asia - the aforementioned series of 'imagined communities' waiting to be realized - are supported by members of South-Asian Diasporas (Anderson, 2000:73). If as Benedict Anderson, quoting Lord Acton, suggests, "exile is the nursery of nationality", then Diasporas may be as vulnerable to their own nationalist dreams/nightmares as they are to those of others. (2000:59).

Without simply substituting terms, it is necessary to recognize that Diasporas engage in overlapping, mixed and partial influences, attachments and obligations that are not always or entirely fixated on a singular homeland. As Clifford puts it: [d]ecentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around at teleology of origin/return" (1997:250). Paul Gilroy's work on the 'Black Atlantic' (1993) offers a good example of decentred Diaspora theory. Gilroy writes of the way in which routes encompass roots as a sense of shared history rather than origins. 'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At', a phrase from the title to another of his works, sums up this sentiment well (1991). In a similar manner, South-Asian Diasporas may be more inclined to refashion cultural dynamics, "orientated not so much to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations" (Clifford 1997:249). This is as true of the Jewish Diaspora. "Jewish homelands", for instance, were constantly being re-created: in Babylon, in the Rhineland, in Spain, in Poland and even in America with varying degrees of autonomy". (Mishra, 1996:423).

Most literary models of South-Asian Diasporas begin with the modern migrations propelled by British colonialism and therefore occlude the long history of Diaspora across other axes. As a partial corrective then, it is suggested that South Asia is a 'host' as well as a 'homeland', part of the route that Diasporas take and the space in which communities establish and cultivate roots, sometimes over centuries. The examples of writers who migrate from cultural minorities within South-Asian nation-states suggest it is possible to be already 'dwelling-in-travel' prior to arriving in Canada, America and Australia. Theories of South-Asian Diasporas should not only imply a trajectory of travel away from a singular-ethnic past to a multicultural present/future.

Mishra divides the Indian Diaspora into two stages of dispersal, the 'old ('exclusive') and the new ('border') Indian Diaspora" (1996:422). The first stage formed under the conditions of "classic capitalism" when, between the 1830s and 1917, the British Empire facilitated the emigration of approximately one million indentured labourers to sugar plantations around the world. This system was designed to fill a labour-shortage created by the recent abolition of slavery. Therefore, the changing nature of global labour-relations at this historical juncture, as well as the "collective drama" of the long sea-journey and bonds forged in *jahaji bhai* (ship-brotherhood), of disembarkation, quarantine, plantation-work, segregation, regulation and systemic exploitation, provides a link between 'old' Indian Diaspora and those Diasporas produced across the 'Black Atlantic' (1996:429). Mishra also sees a general correspondence between the 'old' Indian Diaspora and Safran's 'normative' description of the Jewish experience (1996:427). It is the recollection of a collective trauma then, in terms of coercion and/or persecution, that provides the common feature applicable to each of these groups-Mishra claims that Indian labourers were often 'tricked' or lured into departure by the 'false promises' made by Indian recruiters who were "complicit functionaries of the Raj" (1996:429).

However, the level of duress or the 'indenture-as-slavery' thesis has been debated in historical scholarship. Many of the 'old' Indian Diaspora would have departed willingly for it was after all, only a limited exile with the promise of a return passage to India following "ten years of 'industrial residence' in the colonies" (Lal, 2000:42). With respect to the role of the recruiters in particular, some argue "there was deception [...] but its magnitude has probably been overstated" (Lal, 2000:85). This is Mishra's point too; he refers to the way that stories of deception have been magnified over time to become "part of the narrative of a lost homeland" (1996:429 and 445 n.31). Facts and fictions bleed into each other in collective memory. To offer another example, the sense of "the ancestral home as a place of return, when the time is right" (an important feature of Safran's model) lies not entirely applicable to the case of the 'old' Indian Diaspora, since when the time came, the majority of labourers did not in fact make the journey back. Mishra names V.S. Naipaul "the founder of a creative discourse for the Indian Diaspora of exclusiveness" (1996:431). He takes a passage from *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) to illustrate the 'old' Diaspora's sense of ambivalent seclusion:

[...] there was already the evening assembly of old men [...] They could not speak English and were not interested in the land where they lived; it was a place they had come to for a short while and stayed longer than they expected. They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness. (Naipaul in Mishra, 1996:421).

Indenture created "Diasporas of exclusivism" because small communities were divorced from the homeland and presumably, often segregated in the host-land in a manner that required the self-contained reconstruction of Indian social life (1996:422). The invented sense of cultural continuity, fashioned through transplanted Indian icons and practices, made the precarious, provisional nature of life in the 'old' Diaspora bearable. Mishra argues that "spatial displacement" and the "capacity for re-spatialization" did not result in a complete erasure of India even when localised, necessarily hybridized, symbols overtook those of the homeland (1996:431-432). Rather it produced a paradox, a state where "everything ha[d] to be re-imaged through concepts of purity" (1996:432). Myths of purity and exclusivity, the steadfast refusal of "contamination and hybridity" were directed against the actual facts of intense creolisation and cultural transformation that evolved in the sugar colonies over generations (1996:432-430).

The second stage of dispersal in Mishra's model takes place during the mid-to late twentieth-century, under the conditions of advanced capital, with destinations in "the metropolitan centres of the Empire, the New World and the former settler colonies" (1996:421). This stage is perceived as more complex and diffuse than the 'old' since it is not the effect of a singular system (1996:432). However, the procedures of late capital are considered systemic, constructing and containing the sense of hyper-mobility that is integral to the 'cultural logic' of the 'new' Indian Diaspora. Terms like 'flexible citizenship' (Ong, 1999) and 'permanent transit' (Fludernik, 2003) have been used by others to link the discourses of transnational corporations to the identity-constructions of multiple-passport holders. The new fruits of modernity are also central to Mishra's historical distinction between the two Diasporas in so much as they allow members of the 'new' Diaspora to stay-in-touch with the homeland more readily than the 'old' Mishra observes:

In the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Hanif Kureishi the schismatic break with India of the old Diaspora is replaced by the idea of a homeland that is always present visibly and aurally (through video cassettes, films, tape and CDs), The old Diaspora broke off contact - few descendents of labourers know their distant cousin back in India - the new incorporates India into its bordered, deterritorialized experiences within Western nation states, (1996:434).

Mishra focuses on "the hyphen itself" as the most potent metaphor for the experience of the 'new' Diaspora, particularly for those born/raised in Western nation-states (1996:432-433). The dynamic of the hyphen signals "the problematic situating of the self as simultaneously belonging 'here' and 'there' " (1996:433). As such, the increased access to the physical space of the (ancestral) homeland made possible by air-travel, along with the way trends and traditions are made available through media imports, is just one part of the hyphenated equation. The other axis requires the 'new' Diaspora itself to become present, visibly and actually, in the space of the host-nation. The plethora of fictions, film and music by "new" Diaspora artists are one sign of this contemporary visibility. Mishra locates a precise relationship between losses, longing and fictitious homelands in his 'theory of the diasporic imaginary' which provides an overarching fantasy-structure for both forms of the Indian Diaspora, and for Diaspora more generally. Here, the diasporic imaginary is predicated on a desire (for totality 'and peace') that revolves around an *a priori* trauma, triggered by the loss of the homeland, which in turn generates purist mythmaking. Mishra states:

the moment of 'rupture' is transformed into a trauma around an absence that because it cannot be fully symbolized becomes part of the fantasy itself...the 'absence' is a kind of repression, a sign of loss [,,,,] To be able to preserve that loss, Diasporas very often construct racist fictions of purity as a kind of jouissance, a joy, a pleasure around which anti-miscegenation narratives of homelands are constructed against the reality of the homelands themselves. (Mishra, 1996:423).

The notion of trauma is developed, in a subsequent article, through trips of mourning, melancholia and 'hauntology' via the work of Derrida, Freud, Lacan and Žižek (Mishra, 2001:29-37). Mishra believes it is essential to keep the specters of Diaspora alive, as these spectral moments have a concrete history - in the drudgery of 'coolie life' on plantation or in sweatshops - and in terms of specific events in different places, often based on exclusion and expulsion. In the diasporic imaginary, such events operate as substitutes for the foundational 'rupture', they heighten and crystallize, "retrospectively endow[ing] the original moment of trauma with added meaning" (Mishra, 2001:34; 35; 37).

Mishra's work is insightful, not least because it builds on and moves past earlier theories of Diaspora. Safran, for example, emphasizes the actual presence of the ancestral homeland, its continuity, and the Diaspora's continuing connection to that homeland, indeed, the "ethno communal consciousness and solidarity" of the dispersed group is "importantly defined in terms of the existence of such a relationship" (Safran, 2005:37). By contrast, Mishra focuses on absence and discontinuity, it is not the reality of the homeland itself but rather the moment of rupture/loss, the very 'death' of the homeland that structures the diasporic imaginary (2001:37). It could be argued that the two approaches are more similar than not, that Mishra is speaking of an always present absence and Safran of a provisionally absent presence. However, diasporic writing is not merely about longing for homeland; it is also defined by heterogeneity, hybridity, and double vision due to transculturation at various stages, both in the recipient countries as well as the countries in which they have lived behind. As the dismantling of global and local has paved the way for negotiability between cultures, syncretism is the outcome of transculturation with the intermixing of different identities. Besides undergoing transformation, Diasporas transform other cultures too. Of course, interwoven in the process are the intricate hegemonic social structures of power.

Paranjape applies Mishra's separation of 'old' and 'new' Diasporas in the introduction to a collection of essays he edited, titled *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts* (2001). Paranjape initially divide "the entire South-Asian Diaspora [...] into two distinct phases" with the original "settler" phase applying to "forced migrations" including indentured labour, and the contemporary, "visitor" phase, which encompasses "the voluntary migrations of businessmen and professionals who went abroad in search of fortune" (2001:8). However, by re-attuning the historical phasing to the issue of force and free choice, and focusing on the role of writers rather than the diversity of communities, Paranjape ultimately considers the blurring and merging of the two Diasporas. A 'second crossing' takes the 'literature producing elite' from original Diaspora locations (old plantation colonies) to join others who arrive direct from South Asia in Western metropolitan centres: the once-and twice-displaced literati share the same "economic and cultural privileges" and are "ideologically" akin (Paranjape, 2001:12). The penetration of globalisation results in another type of contemporary closeness, as the 'old' Diaspora is no longer so cut off from the world. These processes do not completely override the differences between writers who focus on the original Diaspora and those who detail its most recent manifestations, rather Paranjape comments on moment's of superimposition and complex patterns of layering. V.S. Naipaul's work is read as the fruition of his father's thwarted literary ambitions and for Paranjape, this provides a metaphor of the relationship between the two Diasporas, in which the "subordinate culture of the old Diaspora can only be recognized if it reinvents itself in the image of the dominant culture of the metropolis" (2001:10).

Focusing on free-choice also leads Paranjape to question whether trauma is applicable to the 'new' Diaspora. He states: "I no longer believe that being a Diasporan is necessarily to be in an anguished state [...] we might actually be witnessing the birth of a new global Indian identity that is a comfortable in New Delhi as it is in New York" (Paranjape, 2001:vi). The ease of comfort this new global identity implies is a significant factor in Paranjape's interpretation of the dominant logic of the 'new' Diaspora vis-a-vis the homeland. He argues the non-traumatic relocations provoke a sense of 'guilt' towards the homeland. This anxiety (rather than angst) then results in 'self-validating' diasporic fictions which are designed to justify why the homeland must be escaped. What Paranjape perceives as the "decomposition of India" present in diasporic texts is "an outcome of the new diasporic consciousness which, because it lacks internal coherence, cannot see any cohesion in the object that it describes". (Paranjape, 2001:11)

Global identities are also invoked in the introduction to *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate* (2003), edited by Amitava Kumar. In contrast to Paranjape, Kumar suggests that the foregrounding of hybridity in 'new' diasporic writing is a method of forging 'internal coherence'. He comments on this paradox, where hybrid lives become the epitome of global Indianness:

Diasporic writers have crafted for themselves a script which allows them to be seen as more Indian than the Indians they have left behind. The recent onslaught of books and films around the theme of ABCDs -- American Born Confused Desis - does not so much present mixed-up lives. Rather, the hybrid or masala self is held up as an essentially Indian trait, a trait which the Indian abroad is able to embody, and which the rest of the Indians on the subcontinent are supposed to emulate, (Mukar, 2003:xvi).

Paranjape responds to precisely this conceit, where the (self) importance of 'Indians abroad' is seen to overshadow 'Indians at home' in an essay that forms the afterword to another edited collection, *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent* (2000). The title of Paranjape's essay, 'What About Those Who Stayed Back Home? Interrogating the Privileging of Diasporic Writing', provides a synopsis of his approach. Paranjape makes his politics of location clear: as a "resident Indian" with 'no diasporic pretensions' he takes umbrage at the "false, motivated, misinformed or harmful" representations of India found in the fiction of over-privileged diasporic writers (2000:228-235). However, Paranjape goes on to argue that "civilizations" not nation-states "are our true homelands" and thus the "real", geographical India is an intrinsic symbol of a "wider, deeper, truer India of the spirit" which exceeds physical boundaries (2000:242-243). It quickly becomes apparent that Paranjape's polemic is addressed not so much to the Diaspora itself, but to the 'West' that stands behind it. The diasporic-native divide is thus mapped onto a broader distinction between a rapacious set of "Western media and publishing conglomerates" attempting to crush and re-colonise (through the fiction produced by diasporic emissaries) an enduring 'Indian spirit' (2000:235).

Paranjape is correct to point out that literary works are not neutral objects. To an indeterminable degree they are shaped by the activities of publishing houses and their publicity machines, the policies of funding and prize-giving

organizations, the objectives of educational institutions, the opinions of reviewers and literary theorists. It is unfortunate that he reduces this complex field of interaction to the dubious notion of the 'good/East/native 'under fire from the 'bad/West/diasporic-colonizer'. Spiritualism/materialism, silence/noise, minority, legitimate/illegitimate are some of the other binaries operating throughout the essay. The way these binaries overlap with a conspicuous sense of the Indian national as a Hindu (civilization) is also notable. For example, Paranjape reasserts his claim to speak for the 'silent majority' of Indians muted by a few noisy truants overseas in his conclusion (2000:244). Earlier however, he locates the clamor of contestation within the nation-state itself, observing that post-Independence "India remains a contested site" (2000:235). This political contestation is simplified and dismissed as a matter of, "various pressure groups and vested interests fighting for their share (or more) of it, while the neo-imperial powers watch from the sidelines" (2000:235).

Fludernik is less concerned with the relationship between South-Asian Diasporas and their 'original' homelands and she provides a model which is firmly located in the American milieu. Like Paranjape, Fludernik focuses on privileged relocations and responds directly to Mishra's separation of the Diaspora into two stages. However, unlike Paranjape who largely conflates the categories upwards - bringing select members of the 'old' into the dominating logic of the 'new' - Fludernik proposes a downward merger in order to separate out a third form of Diaspora. Thus, Fludernik sees the second stage of Diaspora as continuation of the dispersal of labour across the globe, just indentured under another name operating through the logic of late-capital. For Fludernik, the "really different, new Diaspora" is based on a distinction of social class: she contrasts the simultaneous migration of 'proletarian' groups with the migration of professionals to "Anglophone industrial nations" (2003, xiii). This new category is then defended on the basis that the professional group "is the type of Diaspora represented in most recent South-Asian fiction and which mirrors the personal background of many expatriate Indian writers" (Fludernik, 2003:xiii).

An interpretation of the goals and requirements of American pluralism structures Fludernik's conceptual definition of Diaspora. She comments on a shift from 'individualism' to 'communitarianism' in the American context, summing up this shift as a stage beyond hybridity:

Diaspora consciousness belongs to a stage beyond hybridity, to what is now frequently called 'identity politics'. This development is also one [...] from American citizens' understanding of themselves as unique individuals possessing right and obligations to a newer conception of the self as situated within an ethnic and cultural community to which one belongs. this new type of (collective) identity therefore relies on a politics of difference, since the identity in question can arise only from a differentiation between groups, each vying for attention on the stage of American politics, (2003:xviii).

By foregrounding the non traumatic dispersal of South-Asian professionals, Fludernik aims to extricate Diaspora from its association with 'notions of victimhood' (2003:xiv). In doing so she implies the category of 'Diaspora' is most appropriate for economically advantaged groups. Fludernik's attempt to find fiction to match her theory largely fails. Fludernik comes closest to finding a "literary depiction of the South-Asian Diaspora" in Meera Syal's *Life isn't all Ha-ha Hee-Hee* (1999), which she reads as "a panoramic picture of a happy diasporic community that is self-supporting and vibrant" (2003a:279). What she does find is that "pure Diaspora novels are extremely rare and most of them tend to focus on protagonists trying to break out of the ethnic and cultural fold of their expatriate community" (2003a:266). She goes on to suggest that this prominent theme "may relate to the marketability" of such fiction (2003a:266).

In contemporary Diaspora theory, America (or certain urban American locations) often signifies globalization, westernization, techno-utopia, privilege and power, replacing London, the ex-imperial centre once so important to postcolonial theories of 'writing back'. Mishra aims to rectify the general tendency to read Diaspora literature through the politics of either "Britain, America or Canada", as he believes this result in the privileging (or a 'fertilization' of the assumed privilege) "of the new Diaspora and an amnesiac disavowal of the old" (1996:427). As such, his emphasis on the pre-eminence of indentured experience in theories of Indian Diasporas is intended to re-orientate the 'global gaze' rather than affirm 'victimhood' and I would agree that an "ethical relationship to the ghosts of Diaspora is absolutely essential" (Mishra, 2001:37). It is therefore crucial to recall legacies of indenture, as one aspect of the personal histories and literary works of particular writers, as a prominent part of the national imaginaries of various ex-colonies, and as a highly significant strand in the broader South-Asian Diaspora weave.

It should be immediately apparent that in the mantra of Britain, America, Canada, Australia occupies an uneasy position as a superfluous Anglophone space that is most often forgotten, or occasionally tacked on Another way to counter the 'disavowal' of the 'old' Mishra sees at work in recent Diaspora theory, is to decouple the association of the 'West' with the dynamics of late-capital and the presence of the 'new' Diaspora alone. It is necessary to remember that during the period in which the 'old' Diaspora emigrated to sugar-islands in the sea, others moved as part of labouring populations to work in 'Western' nations, including North American and the Australian colonies. Bringing the longstanding histories of South-Asian Diaspora communities in these countries into view counters another kind of amnesia, where it is assumed that policies of multiculturalism are causative (rather than responsive), and giving rise to an entirely new 'cultural diversity'. A related paradox is that restricting 'non-Western' spaces to the phenomenon of past indentured migration may further marginalize (make spectres of) writers still resident in their place of birth, such as Indo-Malaysian K.S. Maniam and Indo-Fijian Subramani, by preventing a reading of their work as in and of the present.

Furthermore, is it ethical to view contemporary traumas (expulsion from Uganda or the Fiji coups, for example) as only an echo of an 'original' rupture? This perspective can easily be twisted to support the coup-makers and advocates of repatriation, by suggesting that Diaspora communities will never belong to the nations they have settled in, are always motivated by a stronger pull, even after generations of residence. As Clifford observes: [p]recisely how long it takes to become indigenous is always a political question" (254). This question takes on specific and provocative dimensions in settler countries where majority Diaspora-populations achieved political legitimacy, in large part, through the displacement of indigenous peoples.

As today Canadian literature and Australian literature reflects a broader cross-section of the diverse cultures, the perception of this literature on the part of readers, theorists, critics or media needs a drastic change. A notable addition to the Canadian multicultural literature and Australian literature is the work of the writers of South-Asian origins. These writers have many historical linkages and generally come from countries that have recently emerged of the colonial past. The works of South-Asian Diaspora writers is crucial in this context as it calls upon the critical attention to shift its focus from just identifying differences and tracing out the dynamics of power towards critical alternatives that recognise and value similarities and accommodation of groups and individuals.. Their writing, in its accounts of immigrant experience and otherness reflects the ambivalences and complexities inherent in the conceptions of the race, class, ethnicity and identity. With their diasporic sensibility laced with double vision of belonging to two or more culture, they not only seek a re-articulation of their own minority status in Canada or Australia but also reflect back on the problems inherent in the hegemonic and homogenous claims for a national community. They also attempt to negotiate a dynamic as to what it means to be Canadians or Australians for those who also have different sites of affiliations in the countries they have left behind. All the South-Asian Diaspora writers in their distinct ways try to make the dominant culture self-conscious of the need to respect them for their "difference" that disrupts the center-margin binary with its transcultural component, and seeks a productive response to the knowledge constructed by them about their past. Their transcultural literature forges the concept of heterogeneity of identities and ethnic subject as a product of political, social and cultural forces –transforming himself /herself and transforming others in the process. Their works cannot be categorised on the basis of ideology or aesthetics or stereotyped canonical standards. With their diasporic sensibility laced with double vision of belonging to two or more culture, they not only seek a re-articulation of their own minority status in Canada or Australia but also reflect back on the problems inherent in the hegemonic and homogenous claims for a national community. They also attempt to negotiate a dynamic as to what it means to be Canadians or Australians for those who also have different sites of affiliations in the countries they have left behind. All the South-Asian Diaspora writers in their distinct ways try to make the dominant culture self-conscious of the need to respect them for their "difference" that disrupts the center-margin binary with its transcultural component, and seeks a productive response to the knowledge constructed by them about their past. Their transcultural literature forges the concept of heterogeneity of identities and ethnic subject as a product of political, social and cultural forces –transforming himself /herself and transforming others in the process. Their works cannot be categorised on the basis of ideology or aesthetics or stereotyped canonical standards.

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