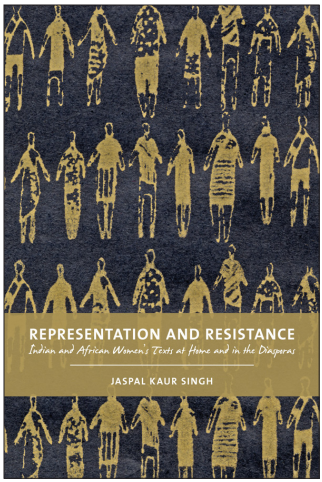

REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE: INDIAN AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S TEXTS AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORAS

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Globalism and Transnationalism: Cultural Politics in the Texts of Mira Nair, Gurinder Chadha, Agnes Sam, and Farida Karodia

This chapter examines the poetics of resistance to gendered identity formations in the texts of women writers of the South Asian diaspora and their interconnections to the Indian and South African nation-states. In their re-envisioning of Indianness and Indian womanhood, certain writers are themselves limited due to their location and class politics. I will examine Mira Nair's film *Mississippi Masala*, Gurinder Chadha's film *Bhaji on the Beach*, Agnes Sam's collection of short stories *Jesus is Indian* and Farida Karodia's short story "Crossmatch," in order to revise their ideas of gender empowerment produced in resistance to certain constructions. In order to examine the Indian diaspora, we must first find out how Indians came to be scattered throughout the world. Additionally, how do they hold on to their cultural identity in the face of harsh conditions many of them faced? Does it matter that identity constructions in the diasporic spaces of the Global North are vastly different from those in the Global South? How do women resist certain cultural construction of identity which they see as oppressive?

To understand women's strategies of resistance and reinscriptions in diasporic spaces, we will have to first delve into the origins of the modern Indian diaspora, which lies primarily in the colonization of India by the British (See Surrinder Bhana and Bridglal Pachai, among others). South Africa has the largest population of Indians outside of India, yet not much is known or written about them. Apartheid policies made it certain that many people's stories and histories were denied access to the mainstream ideological spaces. In *South African Writings in English*, Rajendra Chetty states: "The state … issues a long list of censorship laws resulting in writers fearing censorship and imprisonment.… The South African literary historiography has continuously silenced and marginalized the 'other' voice: the black voice" (12). Indians were categorized variously as "Coolies, Asian, politically as non-white or black people" (10); it is no wonder that Agnes Sam succinctly states in the introduction to her short story collection *Jesus is Indian*, "the history of Indians in South Africa was suppressed" (1). She writes that in 1860, her great-grandfather was "shanghaied" into indentureship as a child of nine and was brought to Durban on the *Lord George Bentinck II*. She continues:

> For as a schoolgirl in Port Elizabeth, I was taught a history beginning with a Portuguese sailor in the fifteenth century roughing the seas in search of a spice route to India. Bartholomeu Dias, Vasco da Gama, the Van der Stels, the Dutch settlers with Jan van Riebeeck, the 5,000 British settlers in 1820, even details about a tiny group of 150 French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France, all figured in history. But how and why the largest group of Indians outside the subcontinent came to be in South Africa was never accounted for. ("Introduction" 1)

These indentured labourers, little more than slaves, "confronted, adapted and won in various situations" (10) during moments of cultural conflicts. Sam adds that "South African Indians like myself have lost mother tongue, family name, religion, culture, history, and historical links with India. Cut off from India, apartheid has further separated us from other communities in South Africa, thereby exacerbating our isolation" (11). Yet many South Asians in South Africa manage to retain their tenuous link with what Salman Rushdie calls the "imaginary homeland." Their

idea of Indianness and Indian womanhood will be problematized in this discussion to see how women in the diaspora negotiate cultural spaces for reinscription.

For the displaced peoples of Indian descent, then, alienation produced a hybrid culture. This hybridized cultural space is also the place to strategize resistance and generate counter-discursive practices. Women use this space to question gender identity constructions; their writings suggest that they no longer take the ideas of "Indian womanhood" as a given. In their hybridity, they try to represent new forms and new ideas of "Indianness"; the very idea of "Indianness" in transnational diasporic spaces is defined, redefined, contested, constructed, reconstructed, or reconstituted for different purposes and for different audiences by Indian women.

And as we can see in much of the literature, there is a constructed relationship between the diasporic community and "motherland" or "homeland." In such spaces, the question regarding woman and identity becomes complex. In order to understand how Indian women are defined in the diaspora, we must first understand the idea of "Indianness" within the Indian context and then examine the idea of Indian woman as it came to be defined during specific historical moments in India and abroad. While there are exhaustive studies available regarding gender and nationalism in India, let me reiterate, briefly, some seminal points which will situate the contexts of these studies during different periods.

Let us examine nationalism and its impact on identity formation in colonized India, particularly, for my purposes, gender identity formation. The group that came to redefine the Indian woman, based on traditional elements drawn from inherited caste ideologies modified and refined through contact with Western education, was the newly emergent middle classes. Nationalism deemed it necessary that women should be refashioned; however, their essential feminine qualities should not be changed. So, on the one hand, women had to be educated so that they would become more suitable for their Western-educated husbands, while on the other hand, patriarchal control of women's sexuality became an added concern at this time because of women's changing consciousness due to modernity (see Chapter 1).

The anxiety that modernization produced in the national consciousness is manifested in the reconstruction of women's identities. Women were becoming educated and were investigating public spaces, which had

been previously closed off to them. Indian nationalists realized they were in need of modernizing reforms.

The result for nationalism turned out to be confusing and ambivalent for the new woman. On the one hand, her liberation was essentially just political propaganda, as reformation did not change the material or social position of the Indian woman (Mitra, "I Will Make Bimala" 245–64); however, it allowed the middle-class woman entry into the public sphere, and we will find Indian women writers belonging to this class, both at home and in the diaspora, exploring space which was previously prohibited to them. The ambiguity produced by nationalism can still be seen in cultural representations of modern-day women writers. While the construction of femininity during nationalism was limiting to women in terms of social and economic empowerment, middle-class women tried to become their own agents in defining their subjectivities, however limiting. This construction allowed the middle-class Indian woman, who is caught between two discursive ideological constructs, to negotiate her identity, even if it is within ambiguous and troubled territories.

Middle-class Indian women who are Western-educated are unable to change their social condition, which is then reflected in cultural representations produced by them. Moving back and forth from the public to the domestic sphere, she is unable, sometimes, to shed the other modes of thoughts and ideas. We see the protagonists of many Indian women writers resisting cultural constructions of gender identity; sometimes such resistance takes extreme forms, such as "madness"; in such cultural productions, one can see the implication of nationalism and its ambivalent outcomes for many Western-educated, middle-class Indian women writers in a postcolonial society. I locate my chosen texts in this postcolonial and transnational diasporic space from which postcolonial feminists, themselves the bearers of hybrid identity, translate and negotiate meanings and identities.

For Bhabha, the space of the "displaced," the "hybrid," is an empowered space which can produce counter-narratives of nations that challenge and displace fixed geopolitical boundaries. In "DissemiNation," Bhabha writes, "the boundaries that secure the cohesive limits of the western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal liminality that provides a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent" (Bhabha 149). This hybrid space is also the place to strategize resistance and generate counter-discursive

practices for many displaced and diasporic women writers since this space presupposes difference without the concomitant oppressive hierarchy.

I argue that negotiation for cultural and national identity is rooted in gendered identity constructions. Women's subjectivities and the patriarchal interpretations of "Indianness" conflicted, and this conflict is reflected in women's writings that are shaped in resistance to this process both in India (home) and the diaspora (world).

Let us look at technology and multimedia and its impact on the forces of identity formation. For the diasporic subject, construction of national or ethnic identity, and specifically, gender identity construction and imposition in the diasporic community where notions of "Indianness" are constructed in imagined communities (Benedict Anderson) in a transnational or translocal space beyond the boundaries of the nation can be problematic and complex. As Appadurai argues, "Part of what mass media make possible, because of the condition of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure, is … a 'community of sentiment'" (8). A group that has never come together in actuality can have group identity due to mass media and print capitalism.

As a child growing up in Burma, I remember watching "bioscope" in small, rural theatres; I spoke an antiquated form of Punjabi. The Hindi I spoke as a child is called "Bombaiya Hindi," which means it is a bastardized fusion of various Hindustani dialects I had picked up from the local working class Indian community to which I belonged. The elegant Hindi, or mostly Urdu, dialogues and songs from Indian films were mimicked by us, mostly to act out our "superior" Indianness in a Burmese-speaking country. In any case, we all flocked to the cinema halls every Sunday to learn about new fashions and keep India and Indianness alive in our memories, when none of us had ever seen India before, except my grandparents, who had left it as children to work as tailors and petty traders in Burma.

This Indianness was co-opted for nationalism during the Japanese occupation of Burma; my father's brother as well as my mother's brother became part of Subhash Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj (army) that marched toward British India to liberate India, the "motherland," as well as Burma, which was part of British India. Azad Hind Fauj was mostly formed by the collective presence of the Indian diaspora in many parts of Asia. However, after the Japanese defeat, my Burma-born parents, wearied by the Japanese and British occupation of Burma, and encouraged

by my grandmother to go back to their "*Mulkh*" (*desh*) and the ancestral land (with a well in it), journeyed to Chakwal (now in Pakistan) in 1946, but had to escape from there in one of the trains that narrowly escaped becoming a "ghost train" (their train was stoned and attacked, however) when India was partitioned in 1947. They escaped all the way back to their land of birth, Burma, and subsequently became Burmese citizens.

We, all my five siblings and I, were born in Burma and still raised Indians, taught to fear Pakistanis (in spite of the fact that many Muslim friends helped my parents' family escape the riots), and learned Punjabi (Gurumukhi) at the Sikh Gurudwara every evening while imbibing popular Indian culture through Hindi films. We also learned about Indian culture from our mother, who, though practising many Buddhist concepts, such as "right conduct" and "right speech" from Buddha's Eight-Fold Path to enlightenment, constantly reminded us about the modesty, honour, and shame befitting daughters of Indian descent. My mother's home truths plus the reinforcements from so forceful a medium as Hindi cinema constructed for my three sisters as well as for myself a certain hybrid idea of Indianness, while going to a Convent School run by European nuns taught us another form of shame – shame of our Indianness, seen as inferior by the nuns. That the nuns treated Indians with contempt and distaste, leading to self-contempt for many Indian children, adds to the ethos of Third World diasporic sensibilities. Thus, in these diasporic spaces, inhabited by the working classes, ideas of Indianness clashed with Western notions of enlightenment with ambiguous outcomes. Some are able to resist Western hegemony, some remain trapped within it, while a few others are able to embrace the ambiguities in complex ways. As a diasporic subject myself, I will compare my own ideas of Indianness to those that I see in parts of Africa on my periodic trips there, in order to critique notions of gender oppression and empowerment.

Let us investigate the diasporic communities and identity constructions in Uganda, South Africa, England, and the United States as represented in my chosen texts. I examine the transformation and dislocation of identities in the West, where notions of cultural diversity prevail; at the same time I look at diasporic Indians negotiating for and holding on to their ideas of "Indianness" in transnational spaces which become doubly oppressive for women due to the intersection of racist as well as sexist structures of social and cultural institutions.

Let us first examine *Mississippi Masala* as a new cultural form engendered in translocal or diasporic space. While this movie received its share of criticism in terms of racial stereotypes, it is worth bringing this film into our discussion, as it will lead to examinations of later inter-ethnic relationships in various locales. Harvard-educated Mira Nair, who was born in Orissa, India, directed this film, and it was released in February 1992. Nair herself is married to the Ugandan social scientist Mahmood Mumdani (Bose and Varghese 143). The film is partly shot in Nair's Ugandan home. *Mississippi Masala* is a story, in part, of Mina, the Uganda-born daughter of an Indian family living in Mississippi, and Demetrius, an American, of African descent. Mina works as a maid in a motel run by her relatives. Incidentally, in the United States, particularly in the southern states, motels have become closely associated with the Gujarati Patels (Lal *Manas*).[1] Demetrius runs his own carpet-clearing business. One of the interesting highlights of the narrative is that, as one character points out, Mina is of Indian descent and has never been to India and Demetrius is of African descent and has never been to Africa.

The story unfolds in 1972, with the expulsion of Mina's family from Uganda when she is a child. Her Ugandan-born parents are descendants of Indian labourers who were imported by the British to build the East African railway in the late 1800s. Mina's father, Jaymini Loha, is a prosperous Kampala lawyer who thinks of himself as an African first and Indian second (although in the United States, his "Indianness" re-emerges when he sees his daughter's romantic involvement with an African American man). But under the harsh rule of Idi Amin, he – like thousands of other Indian Ugandans – is forced to emigrate, first to England and then to the United States. Significantly, one of the complaints of the Amin government was that Indians kept themselves culturally isolated and did not intermarry with Ugandans. Such rhetoric is used by the ethnocentric government to deny citizens their rightful privileges.

The narrative then takes us to 1990, and to Greenwood, Mississippi, where Mina, now twenty-four, lives with her family. She meets Demetrius by accident, literally and figuratively, for while driving she collides with the back of his van. They start dating secretly. Her parents and relatives are shocked when they find out that Mina has actually spent a weekend away from home with Demetrius. Her father is upset, not only because Demetrius is Black but also because he still remembers the treatment meted

out to him by Blacks in Uganda; Jay remembers the slogan "Uganda is for Africans – Black Africans" repeated to him by his childhood friend, Okelo.

It is at this point that the divisions of minority communities in the United States are highlighted. Demetrius, fighting for his dignity and pride as a Black man, tells Mina's father, "You and your folks come down from God knows where and be about as Black as the ace of spades, and as soon as you get here you start acting white and treating us like we're your doormats. I know you and your daughter ain't but a few shades from [mine], that I know." Thus the dislocation and alienation of Indians here are interwoven with that of the African diaspora, whose identity formation in the West is complicated with the history of slavery. Nationalism for African Americans and Indians takes on many layers, and the idea of an Indian and African diaspora and the cultural representations that they engender becomes complex.

What is of particular importance here, therefore, is the response of the other male members of the Indian community when they catch Mina, literally, making love to Demetrius at a seaside resort motel. They attack him physically and then have him arrested for assault and battery after indicating that Mina was somehow coerced into this state. Mina's cousin Anil shouts to Demetrius, "You leave our women alone." Their reaction is that of the clan taking control and restoring honour to the name of the family and thus maintaining patriarchal control and structure. Their idea of an Indian girl has been violated, and they will take any measures to remedy that.

While in earlier films and texts empowerment for Indian women, seen as upward mobility into the dominant community, was conceived in terms of Black/White, where a South Asian woman goes off with a white man (see Mukherjee's novels, for example), in *Mississippi Masala* it is within and across transnational ethnic diasporic spaces that change seems to be occurring. One does not see many textual representations of Indo-African sexual alliances. For example, Mina questions the notions of "Indianness" in such a space when she asks her parents, "What about me?" when they tell her that she must adhere to the Indian sensibility and not see Demetrius anymore. When they ask her where he is from and what his family background is, she answers, "This is America, Ma, nobody cares here," indicating the shifts in thinking in the new generations growing up in the diasporic spaces of the Global North. While in other texts, interracial

relationships mean showing Black/White subjects, in this film, empowerment for women and interracial relationships are no longer so binary; such spaces are the transnational spaces where new cultural forms are engendered and where new hybrid identities are being formed. Filmed in both Mississippi and Uganda, *Mississippi Masala* features a soundtrack – Indian music, Delta blues, and African drums – that suggests that in diasporic spaces in the West, identities are being reconstructed and are evolving into a new hybrid reality for the new immigrants.

While discussing the work of the imagination in today's multimedia-influenced world, Appadurai states that the "creating of social imagination has moved from the realm of social life where forceful leaders used to implant their visions for great revolutions to ordinary people who deploy their imaginations in the practice of everyday life" (5). This fact, he adds, is "exemplified in the mutual contextualizing" of what he calls "motion and mediation" (5). By that he means people who are forced, at every level of social, national, and global life, to migrate or "choose" to migrate in order to make a living. "They move and must drag their imagination for new ways of living along with them" (6). Appadurai separates the groups into "diaspora of hope, diaspora of terror, and diaspora of despair" (6). African Americans as well as Indian Americans, among others, represent these groups – first as a diaspora of terror as slaves and indentured labourers, then a diaspora of despair in the early part of the twentieth century when they were expelled from many nations, and finally as a diaspora of hope in the twenty-first century as they chose to relocate around the globe. Appadurai elaborates:

> The differences between migration in the past and migration today is that now they create new mythographies for new social projects.… Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space. (6)

While *Mississippi Masala* can be seen as the story of a diaspora of terror and despair, as is *Bhaji on the Beach* (as I will discuss later), there are moments in all these texts when we see characters moving toward empowering spaces or becoming part of the diaspora of hope.

Finally, Mina moves away with Demetrius to another city. While such representations become problematic in terms of postcolonial criticism, where Indian women leave "oppressive home cultures" for the liberating possibilities of others, in this instance, both characters appear to use the hybrid transnational space for empowerment. Many cities – for example, Los Angeles – have spaces that encompass multiple nationalisms, such as the Ethiopian community on Fairfax Street where one sees an intermingling of races. Such representations as *Mississippi Masala* reflect the reality of movements across racial lines in translocal diasporic spaces instead of upward into the dominant culture. As postcolonial diasporic subjects, Mina and Demetrius appear to be able to subvert the symbols of modernity. One can read Mina's and Demetrius' act as transnational diasporic subjects subverting the social authority imposed by modernity, pointing to "forms of social antagonism and contradiction that are not yet properly represented, political identities in the process of being formed, cultural enunciations in the act of hybridity, in the process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences" (Bhabha, "'Race', time and the revision of modernity" 252). Nair's narrative suggests that "cultural difference" of African American and Asian American as represented by Dimitrius and Mina are no longer integrating into the mainstream's definition of diversity; the meaning of this new Indo-African merging suggests intercultural transactions, where meanings are no longer "transparent." In the new cultural space, Demetrius and Mina are no longer seen as having left cultural and communal identity and support behind; they are, in what Bhabha calls, the "indeterminated" "Third Space," where meanings must be read anew. In transnational and translocal diasporic spaces, such cultural productions are giving new meanings to cultural, national, and gender identity formations. What is hopeful about "diasporas of hope" in terms of diversity and difference is that for the first time in the 2000 census in America, a new multiracial category was added. Additionally, and more importantly here, Mina and Demetrius do not come from elite privileged backgrounds, and therefore, their ideas of liberation and choice are not so blatantly and unproblematically couched in modernity's idiom.

Let us now look at other examples of transnational spaces and constructions of new imagination for immigrant communities who are forced to migrate. In 1992, a young woman from Britain named Gurinder Chadha directed her first feature film, *Bhaji on the Beach*, written by Meera Syal. Chadha was only twenty-four when she directed this film. The film explores the lives of nine South Asian women, spanning three generations, during one day at a seaside resort in Blackpool. (Bhaji is a popular Indian snack food in Britain.) The film traces, to a large extent, the stories of Ginder, who has taken refuge from her abusive husband at a women's hostel, and Hashida, who finds herself pregnant by her Black boyfriend.

Chadha herself grew up in Southall, a largely Punjabi neighborhood in West London, after her family was forced – the diaspora of despair – to move from Kenya when she was three. Indians who were taken to work on the railroads as indentured labourers by the British struggled to belong to the nation of domicile. Many, indeed, participated in anticolonial struggles. However, when they were eventually forced to move out of Kenya, many landed in the UK. Thus, ideas of diaspora are multilayered and multidimensional here. The cast of women characters includes three "aunties" – traditional, older Indian women; Ginder, who has fled with her five-year-old son from her handsome but abusive husband and his controlling family; Hashida, one of the community's "good girls" with a place in a medical school, but who, unbeknownst to the "aunties," is pregnant by her West Indian boyfriend, Oliver, a relationship she's kept secret from her parents; two giggly teenage sisters carrying a boom box and intensely interested in English boys (since, as they point out, Indian boys are too busy with White girls to notice Brown girls like them, anyway); Rekha, a modern, rich visitor from Bombay, who is dressed in fashionable Western clothes; and Simi, the trip's organizer, a feminist, wearing a leather jacket over a Punjabi salwar-kameez, who is part of the Asian community while being critical of many of its oppressive patriarchal roles.

The film touches on many aspects of gender identity formation and negotiation for women of Indian descent. Simi, who is a politically committed community worker and who talks about "the double yoke of racism and sexism," wants the women to just have a good old time at the Liverpool seaside resort away from their duties as women. Ginder is ready to go back to her spineless and abusive husband only if he leaves his oppressive family. She believes it is the in-laws who are the problem. Asha seems to be a sweet and friendly woman; however, she suffers severe headaches and

escapes into fantasies, which are constructed like dream sequences from traditional Bollywood films. Though college-educated, Asha feels duty bound as a good wife, but there is a sense of dissatisfaction with life as she appears consumed in the act of serving her family and working in her husband's newsstand and video shop. Later in the narrative, as they go about having fun at the seaside, the "aunties" inadvertently discover Hashida's pregnancy with a Black man; they become instantly abusive toward her, calling the fetus "*Kala Kaluta Baigun Loota*" (Black as an eggplant). They act almost as one in renouncing her behavior as bad, except Rekha, who tells the English Indian women that they are twenty years behind in their social and cultural attitudes.

Let us look at what Appadurai calls the diasporic public spaces and the role of imagination in the reaction of the women toward Hashida's pregnancy. Appadurai maintains that "emotions are not raw, precultural materials that constitute a universal, transsocial substrate but in many ways, learned: what to feel sad or happy about, how to express it in different contexts, and whether or not the expression of affects is a simple playing out of inner sentiments (often assumed to be universal)" (147). He adds that emotions (as seen in films such as Chadha's or Nair's) are "culturally constructed and socially situated" (147). Thus, the reaction of the community toward Ginder and Hashida can be understood in such terms. Earlier in the narrative, we see Asha and the other women blaming Ginder for her husband's abusive behaviour toward her. She must have done something bad and brought the abuse upon herself, they muse.

Hashida's dishonour is complicated by the fact that her boyfriend is Black and mixed race relationships are taboo in the Indian community. Asians are also categorized as Black in Britain; however, Indians resist such simple definitions, although it has been a useful term for political mobilization against racism in specific historic periods. Also the term Black is often used for people of Afro-Caribbean descent. Here too we see the diasporic reality of Blacks from the Caribbean as a displaced and disenfranchised group in the UK becoming complicated with that of the Indian diaspora as discussed in *Mississippi Masala*. When the women inadvertently find out that Hashida is pregnant with Oliver's baby, they mourn their losses. They lament that not only have they lost their dignity as immigrants in the UK, but they also suffer due to loss of their culture.

As can be seen in the following example, women growing up in the West have to carry a double burden of being woman and Indian. When the

White proprietress of a café is being racist toward Pushpa and Bina, two middle-aged women, for bringing their own food into the café, Pushpa displaces her rage and racial oppression by turning against Hashida, calling her a "whore and a half," and grieves that England "has cost us our children." They want their children to be more Indian than the Indians themselves. Politics and culture complicates the outcome of such mediated events. Because Indians are seen as traditional and sexist, legal institutions can intervene in their cultural and communal spaces and enforce social change. On the one hand, it is because of such sentiments that the UK has now mobilized legal actions against Indians who are "forcefully" kidnapping their daughters and marrying them against their wishes to Indians in India or elsewhere. On the other hand, the pressure to remain Indian mounts as a reaction to such interference in the culture, and traditions become dearer to Indians due to racism and cultural colonization. As can be seen in the resurgence of fundamentalism in the past few years in the United States and in the UK, culture, with ideas of race, gender, and religion, become contentious and are used to foster narrow nationalism.

Imagination, especially collective, can fuel action. Appadurai explains the role of imagination in actions fuelled by cultural representations. "It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies, and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is a staging ground for action" (7). Imagination propels Pushpa and Bina to verbally assault Hashida for her "deviant" sexuality. Appadurai elaborates, "Part of what the mass media makes possible, because of the condition of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure.… [is] a community of sentiment … a group that begins to imagine and feel things together" (8). Groups that have never seen each other start to imagine themselves Indian, or Sikhs, or Burmese, or Muslims, or as Indian women, Sikh women, or Burmese women. How does the phenomenon of collective sentiment occur? Appadurai explains the phenomenon of shared experiences further:

> They are communities in themselves but always potentially communities for themselves capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action.… They are often transnational, even postnational, and they frequently operate beyond the boundaries of the nation. These mass-mediated solidarities

> have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics can crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergences in translocal social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine. (8)

Appadurai provides the example of the Ayodhya temple incident in India in 1992, when huge sums of monies were raised in the United States and elsewhere to support the so-called "Hindu cause" against imagined Muslim aggression, where political leaders motivated local masses to action, while the mass media mobilized international solidarity and action.

More recently, the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 is claimed to have been funded by fundamentalist Hindus in the United States. The other example is legal action against arranged marriages in the UK. Thus, while on the one hand, transnational spaces are oppressive in terms of translocal social action, as can be seen by the reaction of the "aunties" toward Hashida, there are also possible constructions of new mythologies for new social actions as can be seen by the resolution of the narrative in *Bhaji on the Beach*, discussed below.

Nair and Chadha show cultural construction and mass-mediated solidarity that can become the basis for social action; while the aunties are seen as enforcing oppressive cultural norms, they also appear to transcend and move toward new mythologies in this space as can be seen in the resolution of the film. The movie ends with the "aunties" understanding Hashida's decision to be with her boyfriend, if not completely accepting it. Asha finally stands up to Ginder's husband and berates him for his abusive treatment of his wife when he follows her to Blackpool and tries to abduct their son from her. In fact, she slaps Ginder's husband's face and protects her from his abusive actions. As the movie ends, we see the women returning to London while the silhouette of Hashida and Oliver against the setting sun portends hope as bhangra and reggae mixed music – which is a hybrid of English, Caribbean, and Indian pop Punjabi songs – plays on the soundtrack, highlighting the fusion and hybridity of cultural forms in transnational spaces. The new music in the diasporic spaces fuses styles and genres, representing the fusion of culture of East and West. For example, Chadha takes Cliff Richard's song "Summer Holiday" from the movie *Summer Holiday* and rewrites the lyrics in Punjabi, and adds

Bhangra beats to it. New cultural identities are being formed while the old ones still have a hold in such spaces, leading to hybridized sensibilities and representations.

While the ending of the film signifies female solidarity, what becomes abundantly clear is that although new identities are forming, the old ones are continually reinforced through the media and the viewing of the videos that Asha sells in her shop. We see examples of diaspora of despair as well as diaspora of hope in both the films that I have examined.

Both directors are careful in depicting Indians and Indianness in the diasporic spaces in the continuum of displacement and alienation. They realize that though Indians were dragged to many places of the world and had to live in abject poverty and in racist climes, through hard work and finding sustenance and strength in their own cultures, they have somehow managed to sustain themselves while giving their children a better future.

In the reconfiguration of identity for the diasporic Indian woman in a postcolonial space, the idea of an "authentic" Indian self is produced sometimes by the Indian community and sometimes by the dominant community (as in England, where Indians are seen as enforcing their cultural practices of oppressive "arranged marriages"). This reconfiguration occurs because Indians are situated in nation-states that pride themselves on having a homogenous national identity; such nation-states celebrate diversity and multiculturalism, yet the new space of empowerment, Bhabha's ambiguous "Third Space" of difference, is where new cultural ideas, forms, and identities are being articulated.

In the remaining paragraphs, I will discuss South African Indian writers, Agnes Sam and Farida Karodia, who form part of the Indian diaspora, having lived in both South Africa and the West. Let us examine Sam's short stories in *Jesus is Indian* in order to analyze how the author posits resistance and assimilation in some of her short stories. In the face of resurgent debates of national identity and national belongings in recent decades, such questioning of national identity and resistance as Sam's become doubly important. As we have seen in recent years since the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the urgent need to hold on to an essential national and cultural identity while at the same time celebrating diversity is becoming extremely problematic and contradictory in the Global North as well as in the South.

Sam's short stories are situated in South Africa and England; however, I chose those situated in South Africa for my purposes. Agnes Sam, who was born in 1942 in South Africa, is the great-granddaughter of an indentured labourer. She was brought up in Port Elizabeth, and attended university at Roma, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. She was exiled from South Africa for political reasons and went to England, where she studied literature at the University of York. Many of her stories revolve round the theme of "love" and marriage for South Asians, although she does bring up the struggles Black South Africans faced under apartheid. However, as the author herself indicates in her introduction to the text, what is new about writers like her is that they are tackling issues of choice versus arranged marriages, which seem to be of profound and paramount importance in terms of what modernity promised the (post)colonized women. Sam writes, "Migration and exile are not new phenomena.… What is new reflects women's changed perception of themselves; it signals independence and status as individuals in society; the post-modern woman makes the decision to migrate – in her own right" (12). As she herself lives in England, she sees postmodern feminism as a space of liberation for women.

Comparing women's earlier "oppressed" status to her own, Sam further elaborates on her stance:

> Today's woman may decide to migrate or go into exile with or without dependents. If married, she may refuse to accompany a man into exile, or choose not to return to her native land when a man returns. She may even emigrate without her husband. Today's woman migrants may follow a profession, be skilled, and have her own capital. She may travel to a new country as an employee of a company, with a voluntary organization, for her own or a foreign government and then decide to remain where she is employed. (12)

While Sam's claim might appear simplistic in terms of choice for the diasporic woman, she does, however, complicate gender with the intersections of race, class, caste, religion in her work; her stories investigate the notion of choice vs. arranged marriage in complex ways. In her texts, there are no easy binaries to choose from. The hybrid space and hybridity of the postcolonial subjects who can move into transnational diasporic

spaces in order to transcend national identity are problematized in terms of diasporas in the Global North and South.

In "A Bag of Sweets," for instance, Khadija, a Muslim woman, who marries a Christian out of choice and love – "wanting the right to choose whom she should marry" (40) – is seen as someone who has destroyed the family due to her actions. When Khadija comes to pay an unexpected visit to her sister, Khaltoum, in their family shop after three years of marriage, Khaltoum is unmoved by her sister's plea for understanding and forgiveness. While looking at her sister's hand resting on the glass counter, Khaltoum thinks of the "potential for unimaginable flights" that the hands were capable of. In fact, she sees them as hands that have given her sister freedom, but also "in doing so they destroyed the people we loved" (40). Thinking of the gossip and shame their family had to go through, she resents the natural way Khadija was acting with her, "as if she still belonged to us; as if she had done nothing to hurt us; as if her bid for freedom had not destroyed the family" (40). Khaltoum and her brothers could not forgive her for her actions; she remembers, "it was the consequences of that freedom that we could not forget. Our parents died within months of each other" (41). And although Khadija says she was married to a wonderful man and they have a beautiful baby, she still seeks to return to her family and community; her husband's community does not accept her because, although she married a Christian, she chose to remain a Muslim.

Sam's own stance is that one has freedom to make those personal choices; her stories reflect that even in the diaspora, which should be filled with hope for new beginnings and endings, old diasporic spaces, such as South Africa, remain diaspora of despair. Khadija leaves her sister's shop, never to return. Identity is constructed here in terms of religious nationalism; Khadija is unable to transcend her Muslim identity; she may have married a Christian, but as a Muslim woman, she really has no choice in terms of whom she can marry, particularly if she still wants to have social interaction with her "home" community. The idea of a "good Muslim woman" is strictly enforced in such spaces as religion takes on cultural undertones and women become bearers of cultural and national identities.

However, in "The Well-Loved Woman," Sam complicates gender oppression with the modern notion of love and choice by making it not only about religion but also about race. Most so-called love stories about choice are represented in terms of sexual relationships between Indian women

and White men; if women could transcend nationalism, i.e., ideas of Indianness, it was because they were moving up in the hierarchical space where the hegemony of Whiteness prevails. When it comes to looking at racial intermixing in terms of Black and Indian, we have only recently started seeing the exploration of such spaces as spaces of empowerment or transcendence. What happens when an Indian girl falls in love with a Black South African Muslim man?

In this story, Chantal, a very young South African Indian woman, is falling in love with an African Muslim man, who "appeared one day as if from out of the blue to lean against a pillar" of the shop where he worked (45). Chantal thinks that not too many people know about this man: "How had she never seen him before? When had he come? Or had he always stood there without her noticing him? Where did he disappear to at night? Why did no one ever speak to him? And why did he stand there like that? As if he were waiting – without hope" (41). When her friends find out her interest in him, they admonish her with, "Don't *you* go falling in love with him! He's a skelm" (which in South Africa means someone who is dishonest, crooked, or a blatant liar) (46). Here we see racial biases – horizontal hostilities – against Black South Africans by Indians in a land oppressed by apartheid and race classification.

Most of Chantal's questions regarding the unknown Black African man remain unanswered as she fantasizes about him, until one day, her older sister, Kamilla, who has been married these last six years, returns from England with her new baby to visit. According to Chantal, her sister is the most loved woman in the community. She comes to South Africa to find someone to take care of her children while she studies at the university; while the community is shocked at her decision to go to school, they can do nothing about it because her husband endorses her decision, and everything rests on him (49). The young people in the community look up to her as she has status as a married woman, and she tells them they can be whatever they choose to be: "She suggest[s] the unmarried girls in the family should have a chance to go to university, college, run the family business, be mechanics – whatever the goals – they should pursue it" (49). Such ideas create a "rumpus" in the community. "The women trembled to leave their daughters alone with her" (49). However, no one in the community dares to ignore or ostracize her, as she is a "well-loved woman."

Women in the community discuss the merits and pitfalls of educating the girls; they are afraid men will not marry educated women. Kamilla

suggests finding husbands who do not wish to be the head of households and who want to marry educated women. While she makes bold statements such as "Let our girls choose their husbands. Instead of sitting at home while brave young men come forward with proposals, let our girls come home with a young man and say – this is the man I want to marry" (50), Chantal wonders why Kamilla speaks in such a way when her marriage was arranged, or so she thinks.

Chantal asks Kamilla about love, and her sister assures her that she will know when she falls in love because she would want to touch the man. When finally she acts on her impulses and speaks to the African man, the community is shattered by the news, and it sends "shock waves through the community" (50). It is not that she has talked to a man; it is that he is an African man. By that, they mean a Black African man. They still consider themselves Indian, of course. As I explained earlier in my discussion of *Mississippi Masala*, one of Idi Amin's many complaints against Indians was that they kept to their idea of racial purity and superiority by not marrying Black Ugandans; in fact, in that film, Jay acknowledges Indians' preoccupation with material wealth rather than with taking a meaningful role in Uganda. He says, "Most people are born with five senses. We are left with only one, sense of property." Indians' preoccupation with "making it," either in Africa, the United States, or South Africa, while trying to maintain their cultural and national identity is amply demonstrated in these texts. While the preoccupation with materialism is a stereotype regarding Indians, and is used to whip up anti-nationalist sentiments, these texts buy into the dominant myths regarding Indians as being non- or anti-nationalist. The Indian community's response to Chantal's action is, "No one in this city will marry you now! We'll have to send for a husband from India for you!" (50). They are emphatic that she not marry him, and when she asks, "Can't an African marry an Indian?" her brothers beat her and ask her where she will live if she marries an African man. She'll have to go and live in the coloured area. Here the narrative points to the Race Classification and Group Area Acts of South Africa. As Chetty points out in *South African Indian Writers in English,* "Totalitarian politicisation meant that virtually no realm of personal relationship was left free of politics" (11). Race, of course, plays a major role in the formation of prejudices. The idea of national and cultural identity here is implicitly and explicitly expressed. He is African and she is Indian. She cannot marry him.

Kamilla explains that the earlier generations had it hard as they had to conform to societal roles, but as they challenge the roles more and more, changes are occurring. She suggests that sometimes, in order to gain freedom, one will have to marry, as she did to someone from England, and move away where a woman can "choose" to go to school. However, rather than see the move as an economic necessity – the fact that she goes back to school to gain a better-paying job – she posits it as a matter of choice. She does not see it as a Third World/First World issue, where economic prosperity as well as the demand for workers in the corporate labor force has opened up "choices" for jobs.

When Kamilla mediates between her parents and her brothers on behalf of Chantal regarding her fitting punishment for speaking to a Black African man, Chantal is amazed that she can talk in such a way: "How could she speak so intimately of an African man and not be divorced by her husband?" (52). It is only later that Chantal understands that Kamilla is rewarded with acceptance and love for her sacrifice. Kamilla takes her newest baby to town and walks into the shop where the African man works, and Chantal sees the wordless communication between them and her sister's touches on his face as she simply says, "Maqhmoud, this is my son, Maqhmoud" (52). The readers as well as Chantal simultaneously realize that Kamilla had sacrificed her love for her family's and community's honour.

In fact, one is reminded here of the adulation of Chatterjee's "new women" in India with "spiritual" qualities of "self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity …" (233). Such ideas are regularly disseminated throughout the world via Bollywood films. Additionally, the "Divide and Rule" policy of the colonial government and its aftermath is clearly demonstrated here. Therefore, while she hopes for new choices for the new generation, and hopes that with education they, i.e., choices, will come, the Indian way of life, which has stood unchanged for decades, persists in terms of what it means to be an Indian woman in the diaspora, particularly in the Global South; Kamilla, presently as a privileged immigrant in the West, tries to impose her views regarding choice in South Africa. She does not see women's oppression being complicated by race and class struggles, but visualizes it purely in gendered terms.

While Kamilla's story is situated in the earlier decades and shows that change in term of gender roles is problematic in transnational diasporic spaces of the Global South, in Farida Karodia's "Crossmatch," we see

translocal and multiple migrations impacting gender and national identity formation for women and gay men of the South Asian diaspora in metropolitan centres of the Global North *and* South.

Farida Karodia, a South African writer, born in 1942, grew up in a small town called Aliwal North in the Eastern Cape. Karodia's father was a Gujarati Indian who had settled in South Africa in 1920 and married a Coloured woman. Karodia, however, considers herself an Indian in spite of her mother's multiracial background (Versi 39). Her idea of herself as Indian is further reinforced by her comment that she feels most at home in India (Versi 40). She taught school in Johannesburg and in Zambia. In 1969, exiled from South Africa due to the apartheid régime, she immigrated to Canada, where she worked as a teacher and as a radio writer. What is of special interest about Karodia is that although she writes predominantly about strong women, she does not consider herself a feminist. "Women, I feel, always had the power to change and create," states Karodia. She adds, "For me, they are the most important elements in the story. I come from a family with very strong women … It was a natural progression to write about strong women" (Chetty, "Exile and Return" 146). However, "she strongly refuses to be categorized as a feminist" and does not see it as a "feminist tendency" to write about strong women characters (Chetty, "Exile" 146). Yet all her strong women are located abroad, even though she acknowledges that even during apartheid, it was women that kept the families together (Chetty, "Exile" 147).

Let us turn our attention to the story "Crossmatch." Situated in Lenasia, an Indian township just outside Johannesburg, the story revolves around the younger Makhanji daughter, Sushila, a successful stage actress residing in London. She is back home to visit her parents and older, unhappily married pregnant sister, Indira. Her father is a successful businessman and her mother an elegant stay-at-home mom. The subtext of the plot shows a post-apartheid South Africa, with its new rich, of which the Makanjis are one, and the rampant poverty and crime in the larger community. Mrs. Makanji complains that she has to wear fake jewellery and not her substantial stash of diamonds and gold, as "Thugs just walk by and yank them right off. If they come off easily, you are lucky, otherwise they drag you by the chain until they break either the chain or your neck" (171). Instead of seeing the larger socio-economic impact of apartheid and post-apartheid policies and legacies, many Indians remain locked in the binary

logic of the oppressors, seeing Black Africans simply as *tsotsis*/gangsters, which the author showcases well.

The story begins with Sushila reading a script for a play called *Love under the Banyan Tree*, in which a young wife is trapped in a loveless marriage. Sushila looks at her older sister and realizes that her sister is unhappy in her marriage. Indira has a little daughter and is expecting again. Her mother insists that she loves her first grandchild, even though it is a girl, but would definitely hope for a son from this pregnancy (174). It is only later that Sushila finds out the reasons for her sister's unhappiness; her mother-in-law as well as her husband had insisted that she get an amniocentesis procedure to ascertain the sex of the child; if it was a female, Ravi, Indira's husband told his mother that he would persuade her to abort it in the United States. Indira had refused; hence his abandonment of her while "he's jetting around" the UK and India in order to punish her. The idea of female daughters as a curse seems to follow Indians into the far reaches of the diaspora.

In the next episode, the two sisters are having a discussion regarding Sushila's relationship with Kevin, an Englishman. Indira had found a picture of her sister and her English boyfriend, and declares that, "there'll be hell to pay" if their parents saw the two of them "practically doing it for the camera" ("Crossmatch" 164). Sushila realizes that the "mere thought of her living with a man, let alone an Englishman, would drive her parents crazy" (164). She was particularly certain of her parents' reaction, as at this time, her parents are trying to arrange her marriage with a suitable boy, Dilip Vasant, a chemical engineer teaching at Stanford University in California, who also happens to be visiting his parents in South Africa. Sushila is twenty-eight years old and Dilip is thirty-six. While living in Africa, the Makanjis and the Vasants have constructed their cultural identities as Indian through maintaining what they consider Indian cultural traditions. Mrs. Makanji decries the fact that they have lost Sushila, a good Hindu girl, to a decadent life in England. She asks her husband about her work on the London stage, "What kind of life is that for an Indian girl from a good home?" (169). How do they keep the idea of Indianness alive in the diaspora? Mr. Makanji brings his wife the "finest silk saris money could buy" from his trips to India and Taiwan. Their house is decorated with pictures of Hindu deities: "prints of Krishna playing the flute with the *gopies* dancing around in their colorful skirts, pictures of Lakshmi and Ganesha" on the walls (171); listening to "*The Ghazals*," a Hindi music

tape of popular Indian singer, bought by Mrs. Makanji in London (172); and "consulting with an astrologer to fix an auspicious date and time for the meeting" (175) with a suitable boy are all part of the imagination that they had "dragged" (Appadurai) with them across continents to create their imagined Indian community. This imagination is complicated in the post-apartheid era for the affluent Indians who cross cultural and national boundaries and borders of nation-states as and when they please.

Mrs. Vasant, "a traditional Indian woman who always wore a sari," serves traditional Indian food at home – "relishes, chutney, pickles" (176). Mr. And Mrs. Vasant expect their son to carry on the Indian tradition by having an arranged marriage. Mrs. Vasant had cried when she had found out that Dilip, a Hindu boy, was eating meat (177). His mother is portrayed as a simple traditional Indian woman, whose "too tight a bodice … exposed the upper rise of her breasts. Around her midriff, pinched folds of skin were visible. Her hair hung loose to her waist" (176). How could one refuse to accommodate such parents, who seem to have sacrificed so much for the children's future? He had even taken out his ear stud to appease his parents; now, to appease his parents further and through "guilt," he agrees to meet the girl (177).

Sushila, too, agrees to see the boy to get her parents off her back, although she refuses to wear a sari to the meeting; Mrs. Makanji is afraid that Sushila would turn up in her usual garb of "[t]hose tight, tight, pants.… You can see the shape of everything. Has she no shame to go around in public like that (166)? She declares that "a nice Hindu girl" should not dress in such indecent clothes (166).

However, as Sushila and Dilip are introduced to each other, they realize that they are putting on a show for their parents and are quite comfortable in each other's company and chat easily regarding their parents' "crazy" expectations. Sushila later tells her sister that Dilip is gay; Indira is confused, as she cannot imagine a gay Hindu boy. Later that night, Mrs. Makanji gets up to get a glass of milk and inadvertently discovers the photo of Kevin and Sushila in an embrace, with the words, "To Shushi. My lips, my heart and all those important parts, love you forever! Kevin" (192). She is devastated as she moans, "Such a curse! … Oh, my God! … Oh, my God," and clasping her breasts with both her hands, writhes in agony on the floor (192). In the meantime, Sushila wonders how Dilip is ever going to tell his parents about his gayness; she would eventually have to tell her parents about Kevin, but she wants to do it slowly, slowly. Sushila

and Dilip can transcend their Indianness in the diasporic spaces of the Global North in San Francisco and London due to their cosmopolitanism; Indira is unable to transcend ideas of gender and nationalism because she is in Johannesburg, which should imply cosmopolitan privilege but simply remains local in some sense, as it is located in the Global South. In such representations of Indians abroad, one can see art and the media (for example, paintings of Indian gods and goddesses, or taped Indian music for London) helping the "complex cultural politics of reproduction in an overseas Indian community" leading to "an understanding of the globalization of Hinduism" as well as Indianness (Appadurai 57) to combat social and cultural colonization.

What is the role of the imagination in transnational, in some sense deterritorialized world (for example, the South Asian gay community in San Francisco) for the "complex, partly imagined lives" of the South Asian diaspora (Appadurai 54)? According to Appadurai,

> The link between the imagination and social life … is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one. Thus, those who represent real or ordinary lives must resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life. Rather, ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories. This is thickness with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggests are available. (55)

The South Asians in South Africa are not Indian less because of "natural facts" such as "language, blood, soil, or race – and more out of quintessential cultural product, a product of the collective imagination" (161). Sushila, in her quest for identity, is incapable of thinking beyond what it means to be Indian; her refusal to wear a sari or her thoughts about oppressive loveless arranged marriages are tied to the idea of Indianness that she gets from such texts as *Love Under the Banyan Tree*; she seems "to embrace the very imaginary [she] seeks to escape" (Appadurai 116), for

although she seeks to escape one kind of oppression (gender), as a Black woman in England, she cannot very well escape gender and racial oppression. She cannot avoid exoticism and eroticism, as she most certainly will play the loveless wife of the script she is reading.

Appadurai suggests that because of changes or flux in the global conditions of life-worlds, there is no longer a givenness about place; place or locality "has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux" (Appadurai 56). It seems that Sushila and Dilip can move to a transnational diasporic space – "the journey from the space of the former colony to the space of the postcolony" – that Appadurai calls the "heart of whiteness" (159). This place is, for Dilip, America, a "postnational space marked by its whiteness but marked too by its uneasy engagement with diasporic peoples, mobile technologies, and queer nationalities" (159). This space is in flux due to global conditions, and negotiations for empowering identity for the migrants or non-Westerns become problematic because of the emphasis on assimilation through multiculturalism, which ultimately reinforces the authority of the centre (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*? 252). If one imagines that Sushila and Dilip are empowered due to the privileged social status and transnational mobility, and can ignore community and cultural identity, there is also a price to pay. As Appadurai puts it,

> But while we make our identities, we cannot do so exactly as we please. As many of us find ourselves racialized, biologized, minoritized, somehow reduced rather than enabled by our bodies and our histories, our special diacritics become our prisons, and the trope of the tribe sets us off from an other, unspecified America, for from the clamor of the tribe, decorous, civil, and white, a land in which we are not yet welcome. (171)[2]

Appadurai's contention is truer in the post–9/11 Global North. Though Sushila makes her identity as a woman who has choices in terms of love and marriage in England, she remains "Indian" as a stage actress, performing stereotypical roles of loveless Indian women who is "forced into marrying someone [she] despised" (163). While it appears that Sushila and Dilip might be privileged in their hybridity and hybridized space of the metropolitan centres, the reality, as Appadurai posits, and Bhabha points

to, is that pluralism in such spaces is premature (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 139).

While it is true that there is a large visible South Asian gay community in the San Francisco Bay area, it too, as a community, has to combat racial and other forms of oppression and marginalization. In other words, while they celebrate their sexuality as South Asian gays, which they may not be able to do in India as a group, they realize that they are not quite "American" as the absolute acceptance of racial minorities in America as a pluralistic society has still not materialized.

The problems of being racialized as a minority that is not quite accepted into mainstream American society can be seen by the murders of Sikhs and assaults on South Asians immediately following the attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in September 2001.[3] Too, the imprisonment without due process of terror suspects who look "Muslim" in the Global North reinforces my earlier statement. In such spaces, the dominant ideology of multiculturalism and pluralism finds ways to minimize the challenges posed by the minority communities in order to construct the "host" nation as normative, which also preserves the hegemony of the centre. If in this hybrid stage Dilip and Sushila appear to erase difference through their sexuality, the reality in the Global North is that it has not been able to come to a point where East/West binaries, as Appadurai explains, are no longer deployed. Yet because of the multiple positionings of the characters in Sam's and Karodia's texts, we are seeing new beginnings, as Sushila hopes, while the old are dying, which we see in Mrs. Makanji's piteous moans of defeatism. A new beginning may be a curse to some, while it may be a blessing to others. As Bhabha notes: "Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to cultural translation" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 163). Because of the shifting contexts and the dynamic relationship between old and new, between what is considered traditional and modern, there are new possibilities for articulation of identity in transnational diasporic spaces during processes of change.

Thus, even though cultural identities are seemingly unalterable or bound within culturally constituted categories, there is hope for diasporic groups in reconstructing identity along lines of political and social choices. Placed as many diasporic Indians are in an in-between space, they may be the ones to reconstruct and renew as we have seen in these

cultural productions. As Appadurai posits, diasporic public spaces are the postnational political order, although "In the short run, as we can already see, it is full of increased incivility and violence" (23), in the long run, free from the constraints of the nation-state, this postnational political order is an exciting space as it portends cultural freedom and sustainable justice (23). Nevertheless, the question of who can inhabit these postnational diasporic spaces for empowerment must be examined for a critical and political understanding of identity construction and representation.