

South Asian Women in Diasporic Space: Voices of Adolescent Girls in the Novels of Mitali Perkins

Thesis Submitted to the University of Calicut

For the Award of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

English Language and Literature

by

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December 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis titled “**South Asian Women in Diasporic Space: Voices of Adolescent Girls in the Novels of Mitali Perkins**” is based on the original work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr Sijo Varghese C., as Research Supervisor at the PG Department of English and Research Centre, Vimala College (Autonomous), Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published elsewhere for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or any such title, or recognition. The contents of the thesis have undergone a plagiarism check using i-thenticate software of C.H.M. K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index was found to be within the permissible limits. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI-generated content.

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This is to certify that the corrections and suggestions recommended by the adjudicators, in the thesis titled **"South Asian Women in Diasporic Space: Voices of Adolescent Girls in the Novels of Mitali Perkins"** submitted by Ms Rekha Nair K (U.O.No. 10107/2020/Admn), Research Scholar, PG Department of English and Research Centre, Vimala College (Autonomous), Thrissur, have been duly incorporated. The contents of the hard copy and the soft copy submitted herewith are one and the same.

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Acknowledgement

“It takes a village to raise a child”. I dedicate my thesis to everyone who supported me in raising my brain child. First and foremost, I offer my profound gratitude to God, the Almighty. I am eternally grateful for the blessings and kindness shown to me throughout this challenging journey, and for placing supportive and loving people in my path when they were most needed.

I express my immense gratitude to my Research Supervisor, Dr Sijo Varghese C., for the constant intellectual and moral support he provided. His contributions, both academic and moral, were indispensable to the successful completion of this thesis.

This research work was made possible through the generous financial support of the University Grants Commission. I convey my heartfelt gratitude to the doctoral committee members, Dr Janaky Sreedharan, Dr Hussain K., Dr Anju, Dr Lakshmi C.M. and Dr Harish Jose, for their valuable insights during the biannual Progress Reviews.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr Sr. Beena Jose, the Principal, Vimala College, whose support and administrative facilitation were invaluable to the execution of this research. I am greatly indebted to Dr Sr. Tency Varghese and Dr Nisha Francis Alapatt, Heads of the department during my research period. They were consistently present as guiding lights, providing valuable exposure and support both before and throughout my doctoral journey.

I wish to record my sincere appreciation to Dr Mallika A. Nair and Dr Maya Davy Chalissery, whose invaluable support made the execution of this research possible. I offer my deepest gratitude to Dr Kishnamayi, my P.G. tutor and Ms Beena, my guide for the P.G. dissertation, for their moral and intellectual support. I extend my

sincere appreciation to the Department of English, the library staff, and all members of the Vimala community. Their professional guidance and personal kindness have been invaluable to my success. I am eternally indebted to my mentors, Dr K.P. Mohandas, Prof. M.D.Varghese, and Ms Sulochana M.V. I extend my warmest gratitude to my friends and fellow research scholars, whose immense support made my research journey both fun and interesting. I also thank them for their intellectual and moral support.

I hold my friend Priya in the highest regard for her emotional and academic support. I am eternally indebted to my mother, Smt. Meenakshy Nair and father Sri. K.K. Madhavan Nair, for being by my side always. Their immense support helped me to become whatever I am today and whatever good I will be in future. I would not have completed my research without moral support from my husband, Mr Vishnu Vijayakumar, who made me smile during my tough times. Without his emotional support, I would not have survived my research journey. I am extremely grateful to my sister, Remya Nair, and brother, Ranjit Gangadharan, for their constant support. I would also express my warmest gratitude to my son Vivaan and nephews Adithya and Adwait for cheering me up always. Last, but not least, I dedicate this work to the loving memory of my grandfather, Sri. Unnikrishnan Menon and my grandmother, Smt. Vimala Unnikrishnan.

Abbreviations Used

EAM- Extreme American Makeover

NSSLSS- The Not-So-Star-Spangled-Life of Sunita Sen

WHR- White House Rules

YBDN- You Bring the Distant Near

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Abstract

Keywords: adolescent girl migrants, women migrants, diaspora, and intersectionality

A considerable body of research has been conducted to understand the problems faced by women migrants in diasporic spaces. This research encompasses the diasporic experiences of women and adolescent girl migrants. The current study is based on select novels of Mitali Perkins, in which the female characters are social migrants. The narratives selected for the investigation include *You Bring the Distant Near*, *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*, and the two novels in the *First Daughter* series, *Extreme American Makeover* and *White House Rules*. The novels have been analysed from the point of view of diasporic studies, feminism and theories related to young adult literature.

The study does not undervalue the sufferings of male migrants, but the study agrees with the theorists who uphold the notion that women migrants suffer more in terms of their gender rather than their race. While male migrants suffer owing to their race, women migrants suffer on multiple levels due to their various marginalised identities. The problems caused by the intersection of marginalised identities have also been discussed in this thesis.

The pressure on women to preserve the cultural values of their country of origin is a major issue faced by women in diasporic spaces. This curtails their freedom to choose their level of adaptation to the culture of the host land. A sharp contradiction can be seen in the acculturation process of male migrants, as they have the liberty to choose their level of adaptation. The pressure on women to represent their ancestral culture makes their acculturation process more challenging than that of male migrants. The

researcher has also probed into the novels to understand whether gender issues decrease as the generation goes higher.

Since women migrants are forced to wear ethnic costumes in the diasporic space, their ethnic identity is easily identified, which makes them more vulnerable to racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia in the case of Muslim women.

The research seeks to understand how women migrants handle these challenges; whether they remain passive to the discrimination targeted against them, or actively work to overcome their marginalised status.

സംഗ്രഹം

പ്രധാന വാക്കുകൾ: കൗമാരക്കാരായ പെൺകുടിയേറ്റക്കാർ,
കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരായ സ്ത്രീകൾ, പ്രവാസം, ഇന്റർസെക്ഷണാലിറ്റി

പ്രവാസി ഇടങ്ങളിൽ സ്ത്രീ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാർ നേരിടുന്ന പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ മനസ്സിലാക്കുന്നതിനായി നിരവധി പഠനങ്ങൾ നടന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. സ്ത്രീകളും കൗമാരക്കാരായ പെൺകുട്ടികളും ആയ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരുടെ പ്രവാസി അനുഭവങ്ങളെ ഈ ഗവേഷണം ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്നു. ഈ പഠനം തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കപ്പെട്ട മിതാലി പെർക്കിൻസിന്റെ നോവലുകളെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയുള്ളതാണ്. ഈ നോവലുകളിലെ സ്ത്രീ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങൾ സാമൂഹിക കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരാണ്. ഈ പഠനത്തിനായി തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത കൃതികളിൽ 'You Bring the Distant Near', 'The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen', കൂടാതെ 'ഫസ്റ്റ് ഡോട്ടർ' പരമ്പരയിലെ രണ്ട് നോവലുകളായ 'Extreme American Makeover', 'White House Rules' എന്നിവ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു. പ്രവാസി പഠനങ്ങൾ (diasporic studies), ഫെമിനിസം, യുവജന സാഹിത്യവുമായി (young adult literature) ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങൾ എന്നിവ ഉപയോഗിച്ചാണ് ഈ നോവലുകൾ പഠനവിധേയമാക്കുന്നത്.

പുരുഷ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരുടെ ദുരിതങ്ങളെ ഈ പഠനം വിലകുറച്ച് കാണുന്നില്ല, എങ്കിലും സ്ത്രീ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാർ തങ്ങളുടെ വംശീയതയെക്കാൾ (race) ഉപരിയായി ലിംഗഭേദം (gender) കാരണം കൂടുതൽ കഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നു എന്ന സിദ്ധാന്തത്തെ ഈ പഠനം അംഗീകരിക്കുന്നു. പുരുഷ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാർ അവരുടെ വംശം കാരണം ദുരിതമനുഭവിക്കുമ്പോൾ, സ്ത്രീകൾക്ക് അവരുടെ ഒന്നിലധികം

പാർശ്വവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ട സ്വത്വങ്ങൾ (multiple marginalised identities) കാരണം പല തലങ്ങളിൽ ദുരിതങ്ങളുണ്ടാകുന്നു.

പ്രവാസി ഇടങ്ങളിൽ സ്ത്രീകൾ തങ്ങളുടെ മാതൃരാജ്യത്തെ സാംസ്കാരിക മൂല്യങ്ങൾ സംരക്ഷിക്കാൻ നിർബന്ധിതരാകുന്നത് അവർ നേരിടുന്ന ഒരു പ്രധാന പ്രശ്നമാണ്. ഇത് ആതിഥേയ രാജ്യത്തിന്റെ (host land) സംസ്കാരവുമായി ഇഴുകിച്ചേരേണ്ടതിന്റെ അളവ് തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കാനുള്ള അവരുടെ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യത്തെ പരിമിതപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. പുരുഷ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരുടെ കാര്യത്തിൽ, അവർക്ക് ഇഴുകിച്ചേരേണ്ടതിന്റെ അളവ് തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കാൻ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യമുള്ളതിനാൽ അവരുടെ സാംസ്കാരികപരമായ പൊരുത്തപ്പെടൽ പ്രക്രിയയിൽ (acculturation process) ഒരു വ്യക്തമായ വൈരുദ്ധ്യം കാണാം. തങ്ങളുടെ പൂർവ്വികരുടെ സംസ്കാരത്തെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിക്കാനുള്ള സമ്മർദ്ദം സ്ത്രീകൾക്ക് അവരുടെ പൊരുത്തപ്പെടൽ പ്രക്രിയയെ പുരുഷ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരെ അപേക്ഷിച്ച് കൂടുതൽ വെല്ലുവിളിയുള്ളതാക്കി മാറ്റുന്നു. തലമുറകൾ കൂടുന്തോറും ലിംഗപരമായ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ എളുപ്പമാകുന്നുണ്ടോ എന്നും ഗവേഷക നോവലുകളിലൂടെ പരിശോധിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

പ്രവാസി ഇടങ്ങളിൽ സ്ത്രീകൾ വംശീയ വസ്ത്രങ്ങൾ (ethnic costumes) ധരിക്കാൻ നിർബന്ധിതരാകുന്നതിനാൽ, അവരുടെ വംശീയ സ്വത്വം എളുപ്പത്തിൽ തിരിച്ചറിയപ്പെടുന്നു, ഇത് അവരെ വംശീയ വിവേചനം (racism), അന്യമത വിരോധം (xenophobia), മുസ്ലിം സ്ത്രീകളുടെ കാര്യത്തിൽ ഇസ്ലാമോഫോബിയ (Islamophobia) എന്നിവയ്ക്ക് കൂടുതൽ ഇരകളാക്കുന്നു.

ഈ വെല്ലുവിളികളെ സ്ത്രീ കുടിയേറ്റക്കാർ എങ്ങനെ കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നു; തങ്ങൾക്കെതിരെ നടക്കുന്ന വിവേചനങ്ങളോട് അവർ നിഷ്ക്രിയരായി (passive) തുടരുന്നുണ്ടോ, അതോ തരംതാഴ്ത്തപ്പെട്ട അവസ്ഥയിൽ നിന്ന് അവർ വിജയകരമായി പുറത്തുവരുന്നുണ്ടോ എന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കാനാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നത്.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“A battle is being fought today in the public square, in the political conventions, on television, in the op-ed pages: a battle of storytelling about migrants. Stories have power, much more power than cold numbers” (Suketu Mehta).

Stories of migrants echo their struggles, resistance, triumphs, and failures from time immemorial. These stories may reflect individual lives or create a collective identity; they may be shared orally or published, yet each story has the potential to retain its value across generations. As a substantial number of people choose to cross the border for a multitude of reasons, migrants’ stories constitute a large repository of knowledge, and the stories will continue to, as Suketu Mehta states, have more power than numbers. Nevertheless, these numbers cannot be overlooked. Mehta notes, “If all the migrants were a nation by themselves, we would constitute the fourth-largest country in the world”. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Indians alone constitute the second-largest foreign-born group in the United States as of 2023 (Greene). G. Gurucharan further adds, “While it is difficult to anticipate the future, the objective conditions of development in the country would suggest that the next decade and a half (till 2030) will see more emigration from India” (7). These staggering statistics confirm the need to discuss migrants’ lives and their tribulations. It is pertinent to examine the migrants’ discourse that demonstrates the challenges migrants face, especially from India and the Indian subcontinent.

Diasporic writings constitute a significant portion of Indian English literature. Many contemporary works offer insights into the author’s migratory experiences. Robert Tally, in his seminal work *Spatiality*, argues that literature serves a purpose

similar to that of maps, providing descriptions of places and helping readers understand the world (2). Different interpretations of diasporic writings are necessary to help readers understand the experiences of migrants in diasporic spaces.

Early diasporic literature largely overlooked gender. The entry of women migrants to the world of creative writing brought to light the difficulties they faced on multiple grounds. The academia also had a similar neglect towards the problems faced by women in diasporic spaces. However, there is a growing upsurge of diasporic writings in Indian English Literature with special attention to women's issues.

This study proposes to examine the status of South Asian women and teenage girls in diasporic spaces as portrayed in the narratives of Mitali Perkins. The novels chosen for this study are *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*, *You Bring the Distant Near*, and the two novels, *Extreme American Makeover* and *White House Rules*, which are component novels of the novel series *First Daughter*.

Indian Women Diasporic Writers

The literary landscape features a significant number of Indian women diasporic writers who engage with various aspects relating to migration. Indian diasporic literature has been shaped by numerous writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, and Kiran Desai, among many others. Diasporic experiences of Indian migrants serve as the foundation of their writings. Most women diasporic writers address the issues of women migrants in diasporic space, while a few writers like Jhumpa Lahiri speak about migrants in general. Perkins differs from all these diasporic writers as she narrates her fiction through the perspective of adolescent girls. Moreover, these adolescent girl characters face concerns similar to women migrants due to their gender.

About the author

Mitali Perkins was born in Kolkata, India. Before she turned nine, she had lived in Ghana, Cameroon, England, Mexico, and New York, ultimately settling in California. Presently, she lives in San Francisco. Perkins has a widespread reputation as a writer of children's novels and Young Adult Fiction. Having experienced multiple migrations, she draws on her own migration experience and addresses the issues of migrants in her novels. Her narrators are young adolescent girls, and the conflicts encountered by female migrants from South Asia form the crux of her writings.

The thematic scope of her novel encompasses various topics that include gender discrimination, border issues, inter racial adoption, racial discrimination, identity crisis, among others, which makes her a prominent voice among the Indian diasporic writers. Perkins intertwines these concerns with diasporic experiences of her migrant characters, thereby demonstrating the commonalities and uniqueness of migratory experiences of various South Asian migrants. The wide range of themes is a significant characteristic that distinguishes her writings from others.

Perkins' novels gain their uniqueness partly from their characterisation, which includes female migrants of different ages. Notably, Perkins chooses adolescent girls as the voice to articulate gender discrimination against women and girls. What also distinguishes her novels is their focus on the simultaneous occurrences of instances of the marginalisation of women and young adult girls on different grounds, such as race, gender, and religion.

Perkins' novels are centred on the migratory experiences of women and teenage girls, while overlooking the diasporic experiences of male migrants. The present study does not diminish the issues faced by male migrants; rather, it aims to demonstrate the

unique marginalised experiences of migrant women and adolescent girl migrants stemming from their gender and race, as demonstrated by Perkins in her novels.

Studies state that stereotypical representations of women and girls are still seen in literature (Ullah 135). Sexism is purposefully included in children's books so that the young readers will grow up as gendered individuals (Ullah 135). This trend continues in Young Adult Fiction as well. This is where Perkins carves out a unique niche as an author. The female characters of Perkins are not stereotypical figures who wait for a charming Prince to rescue them from the agonies they endure. On the other hand, they find a way out to emerge from their inferior status and even help fellow females to move beyond the margins.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to broaden the understanding of the status of South Asian migrant women in so-called liberal countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Out of the four novels selected for the research, two centre around women and adolescent girls of Indian ancestry, while the other two novels feature a Pakistani teenage girl, Sameera, as the protagonist. The study examines the novels of Perkins to understand whether South Asian women migrants enjoy better freedom in their country of residence. The research attempts to widen the current knowledge on the impacts of migration on South Asian women. The study intends to explore deeply into the multiple forms of marginalisation that women are subjected to owing to their gender, race, religion, and ethnicity. This research endeavours to understand the causes and effects of multiple marginalisations faced by women migrants.

The research also points out the identity crisis suffered by different generations of migrants. Whether gender discrimination subsides for the later generations is a further concern that has been dealt with in the study. The study also focuses on the additive nature of multiple oppressions women face in the country of occupancy. The experiences of a woman of colour in a place where whites form the majority are different from those of a man of colour. In addition to racism, a woman of colour also suffers from sexism owing to her gender. Each of these on its own is tough, but together they create a unique set of hurdles that a woman of colour is bound to overcome. Women migrants also suffer due to the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Kimberle Crenshaw names this as “intersectionality”. The sufferings of female migrants owing to the “intersectionality” of discriminated identities also come under the scope of this study. The study also delves into the role played by adolescent girls in helping themselves and other female members of their families in overcoming their marginalised position.

A systematic exploration of the novels will be undertaken using various theories from diasporic studies, feminism and spatial studies. Concepts related to young adult literature and children’s literature have also been used.

Introduction to the Primary Texts

The novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* is narrated from the point of view of Sunita Sen. The Sen family has been long-term residents of the United States of America. Their extensive period of their stay in the United States of America has made them adopt the hegemonic culture of the country of settlement. Sunita’s age of migration is not mentioned in the novel. However, the novel mentions that the last time Sunita’s mother, Rancee, met her parents was ten years ago. As Sunita is thirteen

years old, it can be assumed that she must have migrated at least at the age of three. Sunita, being brought up in the United States and her parents having attained a high level of assimilation, is not exposed to her ancestral culture. The arrival of her maternal grandparents from India changed the lifestyle of the Sen family from top to bottom. The sudden contact with Indian culture and repeated exposure to racist remarks made by the hegemonic community cause emotional issues for Sunita. The study investigates how her gender intensifies the emotional issues caused by her hybrid identity. The thesis also seeks to understand the role of Sunita, the adolescent character in the novel, who helps herself overcome an identity crisis and the issues of cultural continuity that are being thrust upon her and her mother.

You Bring the Distant Near is narrated from the perspectives of two generations of adolescent girl migrants, focusing on the diasporic experiences of the Das family, particularly its female members. In this novel, the author showcases the experiences of female migrants across different generations. An examination of this novel elucidates the impact of migration on different generations of women migrants. The employment of various adolescent girl narrators of different generations makes the novel noteworthy among other diasporic writings.

The novels in the *First Daughter* series are narrated from the viewpoint of Sameera, an adolescent girl of Pakistani descent and the adopted daughter of the Rightons, a white couple. The racial differences between the white adoptive parents and brown-skinned Sameera were continuously pricked at by the media during the election campaign of her adoptive father, James Righton, for the American Presidential post. Sameera becomes a victim of racism and Islamophobia owing to her Pakistani ancestry. The study explores how her multiple marginalised identities make her vulnerable.

Perkins demonstrates that her father's success in the Presidential election does not put an end to her marginalisation.

Perkins, an Indian by origin with multiple migratory experiences, has been part of various cultures. In her two novels, *Extreme American Makeover* and *White House Rules*, Perkins discusses the hurdles faced by a Pakistani girl in a white-dominant space. Thus, Perkins is speaking not only for Indians, but also for people who hail from the neighbouring countries of her motherland. The author must have chosen a Pakistani adolescent girl protagonist so that her fiction represents women migrants from a South Asian country other than India. Perkins must have felt the need to speak for migrant women from Muslim-dominated countries, since people migrating from those countries are more vulnerable to xenophobia and also Islamophobia. The experiences of women from India, which is a secular country, and the experiences of women who hail from Pakistan, which is a Muslim-dominant country, are different. Sameera, the protagonist of the novel, who is a Pakistani by birth, is raised by a white Christian family. Naturally, she also practices Christianity. Despite her Christian upbringing, she is targeted on the mere assumption of being a Muslim by birth. Thus, Perkins also portrays Islamophobia and its impact on the young girl, Sameera. On top of everything, her gender makes her additionally marginalised.

Thus, the author addresses a range of issues faced by South Asian women migrants, which vary according to their place of origin, skin tone, and religion and also the issues faced by an adopted South Asian girl. All these factors contribute extensive scope for further studies. Although many of her novels have been honoured with prestigious awards, they have received very little attention from academia.

Methodology

The four novels by Perkins, investigated in this research, are subjected to detailed textual analysis through the lens of various theories of feminism, diasporic studies, and spatial studies. The study also interrogates how the creativity of Perkins is influenced by her experience of multiple migrations. The theoretical foundation for the research stems from the notion of cultural continuity developed by Aparna Rayaprol, Kimberlé Crenshaw's "intersectionality", the concept of "beauty myth" put forward by Naomi Wolf, and the identity theory of Erik Erikson. The thesis also draws its theoretical support from Edward Soja. The study takes into consideration the theories proposed by bell hooks¹ and Amba Pande, among others, to conclude the study. The study alludes to feminist theorists such as Kate Millett, Simone de Beauvoir, and Virginia Woolf as well. The study also points out how the author deviates from the common methods adopted by writers of young adult fiction, such as "aetonormativity" (Nikolajeva) and the "Gender Schema" theory of Sandra Lipsitz Bem.

Amba Pande

Amba Pande observes that women migrants in diasporic space suffer more owing to their gender rather than their race. This thesis strongly conforms to this notion of Pande.

Aparna Rayaprol

In *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora*, Rayaprol makes her observation that women migrants from South Asian countries are supposed to retain their ancestral culture in diasporic space. Rayaprol juxtaposes the male and female experience of migration by asserting that women are pressured to preserve their ancestral culture and transmit the same to the next generation of women, while men are

not obligated to do the same. Rayaprol's theory has been used in this thesis to establish that women's migration is more challenging than that of their male counterparts. The study explores strategies taken by adolescent girls to resist the pressure of cultural continuity thrust upon them, as well as other female members of their family.

Kimberle Crenshaw

Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" (139) to explain how the combination of multiple marginalised identities creates unique experiences of marginalisation. Crenshaw developed this theory to address the issues of black women, whose experiences are very much different from those of black men, who face racism but are privileged in terms of their gender, and white women who face sexism but are privileged in terms of their race. The theory of "intersectionality" put forward by Crenshaw has been used to establish how South Asian women and teenage girls in diasporic spaces suffer due to the intersection of their gender, race, religion, and other marginalised identities.

Naomi Wolf

Naomi Wolf, in her seminal work *Beauty Myth*, examines how women's progress has been curtailed by the creation and inculcation of the idea that women should be good-looking. The pressure to meet these set beauty standards begins right from adolescence.

bell hooks

In her work, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, hooks suggests that the "site of deprivation" can also be a "space of resistance" (230). She calls for a radical change in one's approach towards the space where one undergoes marginalisation. She expounds how one can transform the place where one is being marginalised into a

“space of resistance”. The female characters in the novels examined in this study are studied through this theory of hooks.

Edward Soja

This thesis borrows from the concept of “thirdspace”, which was advanced by Edward Soja. Edward Soja, in his 1996 work titled *Thirdspace*, discusses space within a tripartite framework: firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace. He explains his concept thus: firstspace is the physical space which we can see and map; Secondspace refers to how the firstspace is conceptualised or represented. Thirdspace denotes the lived experience of space. The concept is used to detail how the lived experiences of women migrants differ from their expectations.

The present study investigates the challenges South Asian women migrants encounter in diasporic space. Many of the racial theories that have been used in this study are those that are concerned with racism suffered by Blacks.

Diaspora

Epicurus used the term diaspora to denote the breakdown of matter into minute parts, and he says human communities are divided by the destructive forces of diaspora (Kenny 2). The term "diaspora" is derived from the Greek word "diasperin," which means to scatter across, referring to an act of dispersion (Lahiri 7). This botanical metaphor mirrors the images of soil and seeds (7). A migrant who is transplanted or relocated from one place to another needs to adapt to the newly occupied space, just like the transplantation of a seed requires adapting to the new atmosphere (7). During the transplantation, a migrant faces several challenges. One's nostalgic feelings and sentiments for one's homeland, emotional issues caused by separation from one's family and familiar environment, and an entirely different culture in the place of

settlement are a few challenges involved in the process of migration. If the host land is a white-dominant country, a non-white migrant suffers from racism as well. Migratory experiences vary from person to person according to one's gender, age, class, race, sexual orientation and so on. In recent times, the term "diaspora" has come to be used to refer to "social formation outside the nation of origin. It is a phenomenon involving uprooting, forced or voluntary, of a mass of people from the 'homeland' and re-rooting in the host land(s)" (2). It is also defined as a notion that can describe the world the migration creates (Kenny 1).

The term *internal diaspora* is often used to suggest migration within the territorial boundaries of a country. People often migrate within the country for better employment opportunities. It could also be caused by political or environmental factors. This type of migration is temporary since this group of migrants return to their birthplace after a while. People who move in search of a job within the country return to their hometown once they realize their financial goals. Similarly, those who migrate due to political or environmental reasons also return once the issues are solved. Internal migration is common in countries with a large population, and no legal documents are necessary for it. Thus, internal migration is not as complicated as international migration (Lahiri 4). Therefore, these movements cannot be given the nomenclature diaspora, but only as internal migration (4).

The article entitled *Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return* by William Safran begins with a discussion of the neglect of diaspora in academia. Safran asserts that this is because the diaspora included only the exile and dispersal of Jews (83). Thus, previously, the term 'diaspora' had very limited connotations. The term "diaspora" began to acquire new connotations with the publication of Gabriel Sheffer's book, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. In

his later book, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, he continues the discussion of his notions on the concept of diaspora. Sheffer argues that the Jewish diaspora is not an unparalleled one. Sheffer also proclaims that the diaspora is a vast area that has scope for comprehensive research (Lahiri 1). The new connotations of the word widened the scope for further studies.

Phases of Diaspora

In her work *Theorizing Diaspora: Perspectives on “Classical” and “Contemporary” Diaspora*, Michele Reis categorizes diaspora into three historical waves: Classical Period, Modern Period, and finally the Contemporary or Late Modern Period (43). The earliest trends in diasporic studies considered the Jewish diaspora as a classical one. Rather than using the Jewish experience to interpret the concept of diaspora, Reis identifies the Jewish diaspora as part of the Classical period along with other migrations of the period (43). However, Reis focuses only on Classical and late modern diasporas.

The contemporary or late-modern period refers to the period after the Second World War, which continues to the present day (Reis 45). Reis quotes Kasasa when she says, diaspora is a phenomenon created when ethnic groups migrate voluntarily to study or work abroad, or to join their family abroad and argues that the diaspora is not always a consequence of any traumatic event (46). She observes that classical diaspora is associated with exile to a large extent, whereas contemporary migration does not imply a complete break of ties with their homeland (Reis 47).

Unlike the early modern phase of diaspora, the contemporary diaspora is not a slave or indentured diaspora (Lahiri 43). Except for a few refugee movements, most of the migrations during this phase have been voluntary (43). Nearly all the migrations

were from Third World countries to First World countries (43). The late modern diaspora comprises labour diaspora and highly qualified professionals such as teachers, research scholars and engineers, among whom are from middle-class and upper-middle-class families (43). Unlike the modern phase of diaspora, which was characterised by the migration of slaves and indentured labourers, the late modern phase of diaspora consists of free individuals who want to relocate to metropolitan areas to develop their career and achieve their financial goals (44).

Migration can also be permanent or temporary. Arab nations are also the favourite destinations of South Asians. The migrants who choose to work in Arab nations return after a certain period since Arab nations do not grant citizenship to the migrants (Lahiri 44). However, the first-world countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America grant citizenship to the migrants (44). A significant number of youngsters from India migrate to these countries for permanent settlement. In addition to the better employment opportunities, a higher standard of living, and better freedom in the country are the major factors that attract many youngsters (43-44).

A migrant is very often caught between the host culture and their ancestral culture. Migrants are supposed to get attuned to the host culture so that they can gain acceptance from the mainstream community. Certain communities of migrants adhere to their ancestral culture and resist integration. Such people are often looked at with suspicion by the hegemonic community. Adaptation to the host culture puts them at ease in their workplaces, which ultimately results in better employment opportunities, career advancements, and consequently, a better standard of living.

Types of Diasporas

The diaspora has been divided into different types based on various criteria. Gabriel Sheffer, in his *Diaspora Politics* classifies diaspora into two kinds based on homeland status: “stateless diaspora” and “state-linked diaspora” (23). Robin Cohen, in his *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, categorizes diaspora into five types, based on experience and profession. They are “victim diaspora”, “labour diaspora”, “imperial diaspora”, “trade diaspora”, and “de-territorialized diaspora” (x-xi).

Khalid Koser, in his *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction*, classifies migrants as “political” and “economic migrants” (17). Political migrants are usually forced to leave the borders of their country because of internal conflicts, war, fear of persecution, or natural disasters (17). The latter category consists of labourers “who move to find work, or better job opportunities and working conditions” (17). They are again “classified as low-skilled and highly skilled” (17). Between the political and economic migrants, there is another category that migrates due to social reasons (17). This category, which comprises “women and children who are moving to join their husbands who have found work abroad”, is called “social migrants” (17).

Seemingly, the Das family in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* and the Sen family in *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* are economic migrants. However, the actual reason for the migration of the Das family was that Ranee Das wanted to move away from her husband’s family in their homeland. Ranee migrated to an alien country to join her husband, who works abroad. Similarly, the Das children also migrated because their father was working abroad. Sameera, in the *First Daughter* series, moved to the United States because she was adopted by the Rightons, who are Americans. The migration of Ranee Sen in *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita*

Sen can also be assumed to be social migration, since she quit her job for one year while her parents stayed with her family, which reveals that she is not the primary breadwinner of the family. If she had been an economic migrant, things would have been different. All the women migrant characters in the novels move to the US to join their husbands or fathers who work abroad. Thus, all these women characters referred to in this thesis are social migrants. Therefore, the dimension of the study centres on social migration.

Race and Racism

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, in their *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, state that blacks constitute the archetypal victims of racism, and issues of other racial minorities are only comparable to those of blacks (77). Delgado and Stefancic also discuss the concept of exceptionalism, which “holds that a group’s history is so distinctive that placing it at the center of analysis is, in fact, warranted” (79). While speaking of racial issues, its scope is often limited to Blacks. People who hold the concept of exceptionalism are of the view that racism against Blacks is what should be addressed first, and once it is addressed, racism against all other groups can also be put to an end. At the same time, the differential thesis holds that each marginalised group suffers from racism in its own way and according to the needs of the majority group, which changes from time to time (79).

Racists hold negative attitudes towards people of colour, that is, all those who are non-whites. Migrants from South Asian countries are exposed to racism in the name of colour. Many people understand racism as discrimination against the blacks. However, for the racists, all non-whites are people of colour, and thus, they are discriminated in the white-majority society.

America claims to promote multiculturalism. However, racism has existed throughout the history of America. The non-whites are separated from the mainstream in one way or the other. Americans propagated that Columbus discovered America by erasing the names of Asians who landed in America before Columbus. Several studies have been made to prove racial differences and the superiority of one race over the other (Benedict 6 -7). This group of researchers wanted to prove the racial supremacy of Whites, so that racial discrimination could be legitimized, but no studies could prove the superiority of any race (6 -7). One method of study that was conducted to prove racial superiority was the relationship between different races and the language they use. However, it has been proven that race and language are not directly connected (6 - 7). One's anatomy is hereditary, and language skills depend upon the culture in which s/he is exposed to it. One's racial features, like skin colour, cephalic index, and hair, have nothing to do with one's language skills (6-7). People speak different languages even if they belong to the same race. They may also find it challenging to remain mutually understandable.

When people of a particular race speak a common language and the language usage is confined to that race, it doesn't mean that the skills to use that language are restricted to that race; rather, it reflects the isolated lifestyle of that race. Inter-mingling between people of different races results in people acquiring the language of other races as well (Benedict 7). Thus, language-using skills, just like other skills, are not restricted to any particular race or community. Language is not connected with race because language is a learned behaviour. Race is not something that can be gained through effort, whereas language proficiency can be acquired through effort. (9). Thus, proficiency in one language is not an indicator of the superiority of that language-speaking community.

Racism has operated in such a way that people belonging to a particular race are considered more civilized and superior to other races (Benedict 13). Race is not a criterion to distinguish civilized people from the uncivilized (13). Different members of the same race show different levels of progress (13). It is usually accepted that the white culture is superior to others. There is no supporting evidence that confirms this idea of the superiority of Whites. Nonetheless, it was the consequence of the propaganda spread during the colonial period. Every culture has its own merits and demerits. The idea of white supremacy is deep-rooted in every society, and many of the non-whites accept the notion.

The racial difference is easily noticed in skin colour. However, skin colour is also not a scientifically proven criterion for fixing the superiority or inferiority of human beings. There is no standard measuring scale by which one can measure skin tone and determine one's race. Thus, race is not just about colour. However, colour plays an important role in racial discrimination. Interestingly, the novels of Perkins also expose the "colourism" that exists among the people of the same community.

Racial history has also given importance to the concept of pure blood. Racists avoid inter-race marriages out of the fear that this will result in the loss of 'pure blood' (Benedict 49-50). However, people who belong to mixed race are often caught between cultures and are also often marginalised which causes emotional struggles for them. Children with two different ancestries often are in a dilemma regarding their belongingness. The character Chantal in *You Bring the Distant Near* exhibits such a dilemma. There are no biological reasons that cause the physiological inferiority of mixed blood. Physiological differences can be noted from person to person. Its cause can in no way be attributed to race or racial impurity. The modern world, from its inception, has been hostile towards the doctrine that all human beings are made out of

the same clay (Benedict 105). They sought to differentiate one race from the other so that they could also prove the supremacy of one race over the others. Any racial impurity cannot be tolerated by the people who believe in the dogma of racism. Each race has contributed to human progress significantly in its own way. Arabic numerals, significant contributions made by Indian mathematicians, and ancient architecture in India demonstrate the high intellectual level of the Orientals, which are often overlooked by Western nations.

Lahiri, in the introduction to his work, *Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism*, discusses grey areas in defining the term “diaspora”. One of the major issues is the period required for the migrants to shake off the “immigrant” tag (5). This is a problematic issue since migrants from different countries or different races require different periods for this (Lahiri 5). A white migrant who migrates to a white-dominant country is readily accepted by the host society (5). Thus, neither the length of stay nor the citizenship status is a criterion for gaining acceptance in the host land. Even generation status or assimilation level plays only a minor role in shaking off the ‘diasporic tag’ (5). This is how racism is revealed in a white-dominated country, and Perkins shares her views on this by making the character Sameera of the *First Daughter* series as her mouthpiece.

Though racism is an issue faced by all non-white migrants, racial issues do not affect them uniformly. Racial problems vary from person to person based on one’s gender, sexuality, race, age, and class. Thus, race and racism cannot be studied in isolation without taking into consideration these factors and the social context in which racism is manifested. Perkins portrays the racial discrimination faced by female characters in her novels, though her focus is on gender discrimination. Any non-white migrant, irrespective of their gender, class, or any other factors, undergoes racial

discrimination in a white-dominant country. However, the problems suffered by women and girls in terms of their gender, in addition to racism, make their migration process more problematic. This study delves deep into the novels of Perkins to understand racism and also colourism faced by South Asian Women within their family and among their community members.

“Microaggression” and Macroaggression

“Microaggressions” (Pierce 66) can be defined as “stunning small encounters with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race” (Delgado and Stefancic 179). In other words, “microaggressions” are derogatory slights or insults directed towards the members of marginalised groups (Torino et al. 3 - 4). Gina C. Torino and others define “microaggressions” in “Everything You Wanted to Know About Microaggressions but Didn’t Get a Chance to Ask”, thus:

Microaggressions communicate bias and can be delivered implicitly or explicitly. An example of an implicitly delivered microaggression might be a White woman clutching her purse tightly when an African American man enters an elevator. An explicitly expressed microaggression can occur when a woman overhears a male colleague tell another male colleague that she is a “bitch” after she asserts herself in the workplace. (Torino et al. 3)

Torino and colleagues also speak about macroaggression and differentiate between the two, thus:

Chester Pierce is credited with creating the term *microaggression* and intended to convey the everyday, commonplace nature of these interactions. In contrast, the term *macroaggression*, defined by education scholars Lindsay Perez Huber and Daniel Solorzano, represents the systemic and institutionalized forms of

bias and oppression that impact the lives of entire groups of people. This is most evident in laws and public policies that create systems of oppression and disparities in education, employment, healthcare, and the criminal justice system, to name a few. (7)

Derald Wing Sue, in his *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*, discusses three forms of microaggressions: “micro assault, micro insult, and micro invalidation” (28). “Microassaults are conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit racial, gender, or sexual - orientation biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors” (Sue 28). Such forms of discrimination are revealed by racists only in certain situations: 1) when the person can remain anonymous, 2) when the person is part of a group that shares the same biased thoughts, and 3) when the person is in the extreme of emotions (Torino et al. 3 - 4).

“Micro assaults” are comparatively easier to deal with than other forms of “microaggressions” because “micro assaults” are intentional, while the other forms are unintentional (Torino et al. 3 - 4). People who exhibit unintentional racist behaviour or comments are either unaware of the implied racism in their actions, or they are not aware of the fact that they are racially biased. Their acts of racism become imperceptible to themselves because those acts have become part and parcel of their daily lives. It is also difficult to make them acknowledge the racial acts they commit, as they consider themselves racially unbiased. “Micro insults” (Sue 28) are unintentional behaviours or comments that reveal an insensitive attitude towards a person’s racial heritage, gender identity, religion, ability, or sexual orientation (Torino et al. 3 - 4). The third kind of “microaggression” (Pierce 66) is “micro invalidation” (Sue 28). “Micro invalidations” are unintentional comments or behaviours that overlook the

psychological thoughts or experiential reality of the discriminated group (Torino et al. 4). People who make statements like “there is only one race, the human race” fail to acknowledge the lived experiences of marginalised groups (4). It is great to believe that all men are equal. However, many races suffer from marginalisation because the dominant race conceives the idea differently. As an initial step to put an end to racism, we should understand the reasons raised by the dominant groups in marginalising others and find a solution for it.

Hate crimes are violent acts against any particular group to cause harm to the target group (Afshar 167). They are criminal acts and are illegal. Physical assaults, violence, and destruction of property are examples of hate crimes (167). While hate crimes demand legal remedies, “microaggressions” can be addressed only through awareness programs. Children must be made aware of the equality of human beings, so that racially unbiased generations can be brought up (Torino et al. 6).

The application of concepts discussed above facilitated a nuanced analysis and a deeper understanding of Perkins’ novels. For, as Delgado and Stefancic assert in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, people believe that slavery has vanished (104). Many argue that “with his [Barack Obama’s] presidency, the nation [the US] had overcome its racist past and that no further efforts were necessary (Delgado and Stefancic 104). However, it is a false perception that the United States has overcome its racial past. Though many laws have been introduced in the United States of America to ensure racial equality, those laws have not been able to wipe out the racism that is inherent within the white population. Without doubt, the victory of Barack Obama as the US President and the triumph of Kamala D. Harris as the Vice-President of the US are milestones in US history. Then again, these victories do not signify that the country has completely done away with racism. A careful examination of American society

reveals that racism persists in the country. This is reflected in the writings of non-white diasporic writers settled in the U.S.A. Many instances of “microaggressions” are seen in the contemporary world. The scourge of violent forms of racism also remains a terrible reality.

Definition of Generation in Migration Studies

One of the major concerns of the study is to understand whether the condition of South Asian migrant women improves as the generation goes higher. To discuss this in the following chapters, a brief explanation of the classification of migrants is mandatory. Rubén G. Rumbaut classified child migrants into three categories. Children who migrate before the age of 5 are labelled the “1.75 generation”, children who migrate between the ages of 6 and 12 are termed “1.5 generation”, and the child migrants, who migrate between the ages of 13 and 18, are termed “1.25 generation” by Rumbaut (1167). “The first generation is the foreign-born (the immigrants), the second generation is the American-born (native-born) children of immigrants, and the third generation is the grandchildren of the immigrants” (Waters and Pineau 17). Immigrants who migrate as children are often categorised under the label 1.5 generation (Waters and Pineau 17). In this study, the term second generation has been used to denote the grandchildren of the immigrants, since the children of immigrants belong to one and a half generations. The practice commonly followed is labelling child migrants up to the age of 12 as “1.5 generation”.

In the context of migration, the term generation has several connotations. It may include an inclination towards or drifting away from ancestral cultural habits, or readiness to accept the new culture or uneasiness with the newly confronted culture, language acquisition (Lahiri 56). All these factors associated with migration determine

the adaptability rate. The experiences of people who migrate as adults differ from those who migrate during childhood. The experiences of second-generation migrants, that is, children born to first-generation migrants in the host country, also differ from the other two. The study investigates how adolescent migrant girls handle their migratory experience and support other female members of their families to overcome the challenges that come their way.

Types of Acculturations

Migrants undergo three distinct stages before they get assimilated: contact, conflict, and acculturation (Lahiri 155). The term “acculturation” refers to the process by which migrants adapt to the mainstream culture, while the term “assimilation” refers to an extreme form of acculturation (155). It refers to the complete surrender of one’s ethnic culture to the hegemonic culture; that is, an assimilated person has completely lost their ethnic culture (155).

During the acculturation stage, migrants learn the language and lifestyle of the mainstream community. The rates at which primary migrants acculturate and retain their ancestral culture are not uniform, which significantly impacts the adaptation rate of the second generation. Most of the migrants favour acculturation over assimilation. There are different levels of acculturation: “Dissonant”, “consonant,” and “selective” acculturation (Portes and Rubén 53 - 54).

Dissonant acculturation takes place when children’s learning of the English language and American ways, and the simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture, outstrips their parents. This is the situation leading to role reversal, especially when parents lack other means to maneuver in the host society without help from their children. (Portes and Rubén 53 -54)

This is the kind of acculturation attained by the Das family in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*.

Consonant acculturation is the opposite situation, where the learning process and gradual abandonment of the home language and culture occur at roughly the same pace across generations. This situation is most common when immigrant parents possess enough human capital to accompany the cultural evolution of their children and monitor it. (Portes and Rubén 54)

This is the kind of acculturation pattern adopted by the Sen family in the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*.

Selective acculturation takes place when the learning process of both generations is embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote partial retention of the parents' home language and norms. This third option (selective acculturation) is associated with a relative lack of intergenerational conflict, the presence of many co-ethnics among children's friends, and the achievement of full bilingualism in the second generation. (Portes and Rubén 54)

The mode of acculturation depends on various factors such as the socioeconomic status of migrant parents and family composition (54). When parents have sufficient resources such as money, education, and support from co-ethnic communities, there are higher chances for consonant or selective forms of acculturation (54). On the contrary, parents who do not possess sufficient resources are more liable to experience dissonant modes of acculturation and role reversal (54). Perkins demonstrates different kinds of acculturation in her novels.

Migration of Women

According to the 2005 UN statistics, the number of female immigrants exceeds male immigrants in Europe and Latin America (Koser 6). This high representation of female migrants is one of the key features of contemporary migration. This trend can be traced back to 1960. Before 1960, only men migrated as primary breadwinners; women were not allowed to leave home to pursue a career. Overseas migration of women was considered taboo. Additionally, most of the countries did not grant permission to bring the families of the migrants. Therefore, the number of women migrants was very low. Later, family reunion policies were introduced in many countries. Then, many women migrated to join their husbands (Kenny 97). Hence, in the initial stage of women's migration in the contemporary age, women migrated as social migrants.

However, things are changing now, and women migrate independently and as primary breadwinners. One reason behind the increase in the number of women migrants is that they are preferred in many sectors like healthcare, entertainment, and services (Koser 7). Secondly, more countries have granted migrants the right to be joined by their families, and thus, women crossed the borders to join their husbands. Also, several women from developing/underdeveloped countries migrate as domestic workers (7). All these are the reasons for the considerable increase in the number of female migrants.

Any migrant, regardless of gender or race, encounters several issues in the country of settlement. However, women suffer more because of their gender identity, and it is same for adolescent girl migrants. The female characters in the novels of Perkins are social migrants. The problems they confront and the attitude they take form the thrust of this study.

Feminist Theory as a Critical Lens

Women have been talking about the discrimination they suffer on account of their gender for centuries. However, “feminism” developed as a concept when Charles Fourier used the term for the first time in 1837 (McCann et al.14). The term gained currency in the following years in England and the US (14). Feminism is a movement that aims to wipe out gender inequalities that are manifested in various spheres of life (14). It aims to uplift the status of women and make sure that women experience all the privileges that men enjoy (14). Marisa Bate, in her work *The Periodic Table of Feminism*, asserts that it is challenging to define feminism or to understand it fully. This is because feminism is not a singular narrative. It deals with various issues of women, like voting rights, legalizing abortion, the right to work, and so on (10).

Feminism was initially a white-dominant movement that tried to address the issues of white women. Indeed, some concerns are universally applicable to women. That does not mean every single issue is the same for all women around the world. The manifestation of gender oppression is found in different forms across the globe. This demands unique and dedicated solutions to redress the concerns. In developing/underdeveloped countries, women face challenges that are different from the problems encountered by women in developed countries (McCann et al.14). It was in 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the concept of “Intersectionality” (14). It refers to the multiple forms of oppression faced by women of colour (14). Such issues were never addressed by the feminists till then. This is because the feminist movement was overwhelmingly represented by white middle-class women, who never understood the problems of women of colour (14).

In “Racism and Feminism”, hooks argues that, in America, the social status of black women and white women has always been different. Though both black and white women suffered from gender discrimination, black women were victims of sufferings that no white woman had to endure (374-76). The pioneer advocates of women’s rights in America never sought equality for all women. On the other hand, they sought equality for white women.

The relationship between women of colour and white women had always been a strained one. The beginning of the feminist movement never brought them together. Even though the later forms of feminism claimed the sisterhood of American women irrespective of their race and class, the same was found only in words, not in acts (hooks, “Racism and Feminism” 380).

In “Racism and Feminism”, hooks states that in the majority of feminist writing, what they claimed as American women’s experience dealt with white American women’s experience. If the narratives had claimed to portray the stories of white women, it would not have been racist. On the contrary, they portrayed the sufferings of white women and claimed to represent the entire American women’s experience (380-81). Thus, women of colour remained completely invisible at the beginning of the feminist movement.

White women who were part of the movement stressed “common oppression”. They had an impression that they would project sisterhood among women of all races. They considered themselves to be generous and non-racist, while the women of colour did not feel the same. Initially, women of colour were enthusiastic to be part of the feminist movement. They were of the notion that the movement would uplift women of all races. However, the experiences of non-white women were completely ignored by

white feminists. Very soon, they realised that the movement represented only middle-class and upper-middle-class college-educated white women. Their experiences being structured by racism and gender issues are entirely different from what white women undergo under the patriarchal system. Women of colour refused to continue to be a part of the movement, whose majority participants were keen to maintain racial and class differences (hooks, "Racism and Feminism" 382-84). Hazel V. Carby also shares a similar idea in her essay, "White Woman Listen!" (390). When white feminists tried to address patriarchy, the women of colour wanted to redefine the sense of feminism by including the issues of race, as they are doubly marginalised due to their race and gender.

South Asian women were offered sisterhood by Black feminists in the infant stage of Black Feminism (Hussain 33). Thus, after they got separated from the white feminist movement, all the non-white women were part of the same feminist movement (33). This is because all non-whites are marginalised in a white-dominant society. Thus, South Asian women writers produced literature alongside other Black women writers, in particular, during the 1970s and 1980s. It is the black feminist movement that theorized the intersectionality of Black women who are marginalised due to their gender, race, and sometimes class. Black women were critical of white feminist theories and practices. Later, these women were separated based on their ethnic categories, so that they could speak out about their problems that are specific to them (33-34).

The experiences of a woman of colour in a place where whites form the majority are different from those of a man of colour. A woman of colour faces racism as a consequence of her race and also sexism owing to her gender. Being marginalised on any of these grounds itself is difficult, but together they create a unique set of challenges that a woman of colour should overcome. This forms the main theme of all

four novels of Perkins, taken for this study. Patriarchy takes its extreme form in South Asian Countries. Hence, freedom of women is limited in these countries. Women from South Asian countries migrate to Western countries with the hope of a better life. However, the migrants carry the burden of patriarchy that existed in their ancestral land to the country of settlement as well. There, too, she is assigned gender roles by people of their ethnic community. In addition to the sexism, the politics of race in the settlement country adds to their sufferings.

This study refers to feminist theorists irrespective of their country of origin, since many issues of women are common. The novels portray the issues faced by women migrants through the lens of adolescent girls. This study reinstates the established idea that gender discrimination is an issue that also challenges adolescent girls.

South Asian Women Migrants in the Novels of Perkins

Aparna Rayaprol, in her *Negotiating Identities*, asserts that women in India have power only as the mother of a son (123). Though India has moved far from the age of the Vedas and epics, Indian society continues to idealize characters like Sita and Savitri, who embody chastity and loyalty to their husbands (123). Towards the end of the 1980s, the *Ramayana* was serialized on television. Sita's image as the ideal woman influenced Indian minds, and Indian women were expected to identify with Sita (127). Though the novelist never openly discusses these ideal woman characters in her novels, the qualities women migrants are expected to possess similarities with these idealistic women. Perkins, as a diasporic writer with multiple migratory experiences, suggests through her novels that even women who leave their homeland are not free from the pressure to meet the ideal standards expected of an Indian woman.

The gender discrimination in Pakistan is even worse. However, the author does not portray the gender discrimination in Pakistan or the pressure of cultural continuity faced by Pakistani women in diasporic space. Sameera, the Pakistani character of Perkins, was adopted when she was three years old. She is portrayed as a person who would like to assert her birth identity. One should be liberated enough to choose the culture one should follow. Perkins's *First Daughter* series centers around the character Sameera and highlights various issues including her hybrid identity., challenges owing to her gender, race, age and country of birth.

Women, being a marginalised gender, very often choose to migrate either as primary breadwinners or as social migrants, so that they can escape the marginalisation they suffer in their home nation. Migration is a sort of escapism for South Asian women. The form of patriarchy that exists in countries like India expects married women to be part of their husbands' families, where they have to suffer at the hands of their in-laws.

Women have always been assigned a secondary position in most parts of the world, though the concerns and the atrocities they face vary by race, ethnicity, and cultural background. In a country like India, where the joint family system is followed, women are expected to be subservient within and outside the family. The majority of Indian families still do not prefer working women as their daughters-in-law. Indeed, many women these days, opt to be working women. Employed women are often criticized for being non-responsible towards their family members. In Indian culture, a woman is responsible not only to her children and husband, but also to her in-laws. Sometimes, she is answerable to her extended family members and society. Women are not supposed to raise their voice against the criticisms levelled against them and are expected to suffer silently, without resisting.

Indian cultural history claims that the people of our country treated women like Goddesses. However, it is a sad truth that we lost such values at some point in time. For many centuries, women have been treated as “The Second Sex” (de Beauvoir) in India as well. The conditions of women in countries like Pakistan are even more pathetic because the laws that exist there are mostly misogynistic. A woman is always answerable to the male members of the family. Decision-making power within the family rests in the hands of men, while the responsibilities of women are confined to obeying the male members of their families.

Even though the human race has advanced in many walks of life, the prevailing perspective on gender remains a persistent shackle. Women suffering in the name of dowry, or for being unable to bear a boy child, are familiar scenes in India even today. Such circumstances are, sometimes, the motivating factors behind migration. Moving from the parental home is also a matter that is criticized by Indian society and Indian parents. Even if they move to a nuclear family setup within India, the daughters-in-law are blamed for making such a decision. Hence, migration is the only option people have to move to a nuclear family set-up. While the desire for a better lifestyle is what motivates Indians to migrate, internal political disturbance is a major push factor in the case of Pakistani migrants. However, the Pakistani migrant character Sameera is an adolescent girl who migrated at the age of three, through interracial adoption.

Women and adolescent girl migrants encounter several challenges in the diasporic space as well, owing to their gender and race. The complexities of the combination of race and gender make the migration more challenging for women than their male counterparts. Sometimes, their marginalisation can be a consequence of the intersection of their multiple identities. The term “intersectionality” was coined by American Law Professor and critical race theorist Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in her

essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. According to Crenshaw, while considering the multiplicity of oppression, instead of an additive approach, one should try to understand how racism is gender-biased or class oppression is racially-biased (McCann et al.243).

The female characters in the novels taken for the present study are social migrants who join their husbands/fathers who work abroad. The two novels in the *First Daughter* series portray Sameera, a Pakistani girl adopted by white parents. The novels in the series also elucidate the challenges faced by various South Asian migrants in a primarily white country. This study is an inquiry into how their gender makes the migratory experiences unique for South Asian female migrants settled in a white dominant country. The current research examines women as social migrants who are permanent settlers in the country of settlement. This study undertakes an examination of the lives of subsequent generations as presented in select novels by Perkins.

The selected literary works are analysed to uncover the role of adolescent girls in uplifting themselves and other female members of their family and social circle to emerge from their marginalised position owing to their gender. The female characters in *You Bring the Distant Near* and *The Not-So-Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* struggle due to the pressure given to them to retain their ancestral culture. The subjugation of women is vital in constructing and retaining ethnic values, especially in diasporic spaces. Sameera, in the *First Daughter* series, suffers on account of her racial and religious identity.

Literature Review

Cohen, in his *Theories of Migration* (1996), discusses sets of contrasting ideas like “Individual vs. contextual” reasons to migrate, “internal vs. international

migration”, “temporary vs. permanent migration”, “settler vs. labour migration”, “planned vs. flight migration”, “economic vs. political refugees”, “legal vs. illegal migrants”, push vs. pull factors, which are inevitable in understanding migration (xii – xv). Cohen points out many paradoxical aspects of migration. He states that understanding diaspora through these paradoxical aspects is important. This is because the experiences of each category of migrants are different from those of others. The migratory experiences of legal migrants are different from the migratory experiences of illegal migrants; the experiences of political migrants are not similar to those of economic migrants. Thus, the experience of migrants in each category is unique. The intersection of any of these categorisations again makes the experience of migrants unique. However, his dyadic approach to the study of migration could have been extended to other factors such as gender, sexual orientation, and the like. Cohen’s disregard for the role of women in migration and the challenges they face in the journey of migration reflects how the aspect of gender has been neglected even by great diasporic theorists. The present study aims to understand how the migratory experiences of women are shaped uniquely by their race and gender.

Avtar Brah, in her *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), discusses British immigration laws, which discriminated against people of Asian ancestry. “Every single Asian woman settled in Britain was regarded as a prospective sponsor of a fiancé from the subcontinent” (Brah 75). The immigration laws related to the entry of husbands and fiancés of migrant women were amended five times between 1969 and 1983, to prevent non-white migrant women from joining their husbands in Britain, whereas the rule permitted white women migrants to rejoin their husbands (75). When this gender-discriminating policy was questioned, the British government made it equally difficult for a man to sponsor his wife, so that there is no question of gender

inequality (75). These amendments mirror the racism and sexism prevalent in British society. Thus, the white nations are also not free from gender discrimination. The novels of Perkins expose the racial and gender biases as seen in the United States of America.

Robin Cohen, in his *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997), discusses the positive consequences of diaspora by saying, “the tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one” (24). He cites the example of Jews who immensely contributed to various fields, including “medicine, theology, art, music, philosophy, literature, science, industry and commerce” (24). This is true in the case of diasporic writers as well. Most of the migrant writers address the concerns of migrants in their novels. Thus, their migratory experience is what contributes to their creativity. Likewise, Perkins, a migrant, shares her diasporic experiences in her writings.

“That’s all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations” is a statement made by Meena Alexander on her multiple migratory experiences (Nayar 180). One of the major challenges encountered by any migrant is coming to terms with one’s identity. Most of the migrants are caught between the cultures of their homeland and the host land. In the initial phase of migration, they look at both cultures critically, neither assimilating nor retaining their ancestral culture. The extension of this state in which they exhibit the traces of both cultures is being referred to as “hybridity” by Homi K. Bhabha (Nayar 180). This involves rejecting any single identity and embracing the cultural norms of both cultures. According to Bhabha, this in-between hybrid identity is better than a fixed, stereotypical identity, an idea which is endorsed by Salman Rushdie (180). However, the hybrid identity is not practical for common people. Homi K. Bhabha is a professor at Harvard, and Rushdie is a celebrated writer (180). The

experience of migration is entirely different for common folks. Again, it is different for migrant women (180). Their ethnic identity, gender, class, and many other aspects of their identity come their way. Pramod Nayar notes that Bhabha and Rushdie fail to address the issues of gender (180). They are silent about the problems encountered by African or Asian migrant women (180).

Alleen Pace Nilsen, in her article “Women in Children’s Literature” (1971), examines the absence of female characters in many children’s works. Nilsen cites the experience of Scott O’Dell, the author of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, whom a publisher asked to rewrite the work by replacing the heroine with a hero (918). The lucrative motives reveal that the children’s literature with boy characters has more readers, as they are read by both girls and boys, while books with female protagonists are read by girls only. The article examines the inadequate representation of female characters in children’s works. Most of the novels of Perkins have adolescent girls as protagonists who try to solve the problems they encounter by themselves, rather than expecting a heroic male character to help them overcome their issues, which is really appreciable.

Donna Gabaccia, in her *Immigrant Women: Nowhere at Home?* (1991) discusses how academia failed to address the unique issues of women, even after it turned its focus to women (64). She states that the reason behind this is that “uniquely female or private familial events are assumed to have no direct impact on community life” (64).

Another interesting article by Vanaja Dhruvarajan, titled *Ethnic Cultural Retention and Transmission Among First Generation Hindu Asian Indians in a Canadian Prairie City* (1993), demonstrates gender discrimination prevalent among the Hindu Asian Indian diasporic community. Dhruvarajan states that migrants from India

think that “taking care of the family is a woman’s sacred duty and a man should be the head of the family” (68). The findings of the study demonstrate that “daughters and sons are treated differently by both men and women” (69). They agree that the sons enjoy better freedom in making decisions regarding their dating and marriage (69). Dhruvarajan makes her observation that “more women than men encourage their children to practice their religion and culture in general as well as speak their ethnic language” (70). Her findings establish that “Hindu Asian Indian immigrants” (75) continue to practice the cultural norms practised in the ancestral land, in the diasporic space as well. Her findings also demonstrate that women are held responsible for the transmission of cultural values to their children. The findings of Dhruvarajan are based on a study conducted among first-generation migrants who were members of the Hindu society of Manitoba in 1985.

Jill P. May, in her “Feminism and Children’s Literature: Fitting Little Women into the American Literary Canon” (1994), argues that women writers “create images of their contemporary society that are opaque enough in design and style to encourage change while recording current societal attitudes” (27). Perkins, in her novels, deviates from the stereotypical portrayal of women characters and portrays strong-willed women who are protagonists of their own lives.

Leela Gulati, in her *Asian Women in International Migration: With Special Reference to Domestic Work and Entertainment* (1997), points out that the number of women workers who migrate internationally has been increasing since the 1980s (3029). In the article, Gulati explores the challenges faced by women workers from Asian countries in the diasporic space. She also observes that most of these women are either domestic workers or entertainers. The study discusses the vulnerability of women migrants when they migrate for work.

Women, Homelands, and the Indian Diaspora (1998) by Nandi Bhatia, focuses on the migrants' use of the concept of homeland, or rather the "imaginary homeland", to restore "an identity that provides communities with a sense of security and certainty" (514). Bhatia also discusses the repressive nature of the prescribed roles of women. The author concludes by pointing out that the development of a nationalistic idea of the "homeland" goes against the well-being of women (524). A distinct interpretation of the researcher is that the entire concept of "homeland" itself is a creation of patriarchy to ensure the submissiveness of women.

The idea that women enjoy better freedom in the United States and the United Kingdom is just a constructed idea. Even during colonialism, the whites propagated the notion that only women in Oriental countries are discriminated, while the women of their country experienced gender equality. However, the history of colonialism portrays that white women were also marginalised in their own way. During the colonial period, the mobility of white women who settled in colonised spaces was restricted, and these women were expected to move around only when accompanied by white men. The justification behind this restriction was mere apprehension of white women being attacked by non-white men. So, their freedom to independent mobility was also restricted.

The paper "Is there a Second Diasporic Generation? The Case of India's Hyderabadis" (2009) by Karen Isaksen Leonard discusses the differences in the attitudes of the first generation and second-generation migrants towards their ancestral land. Leonard observes that while the first generation retains their Hyderabad identity, the second generation does not identify themselves as Hydrabadis. This study, which is based on the select novels of Perkins, seeks to understand the generational differences in women migrants' experiences.

Dolores Herrero's paper entitled "Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*: Female Subjectivity and the Ethics of Care and Commitment at the Shock of Return" (2009) offers a detailed discussion on how women migrants liberate themselves by lending support to each other.

The article "Creating a 'Masala' Self: Bicultural Identity in Desi Young Adult Novels" (2010) by Michelle Superle analyses the then-recent budding diasporic young adult fiction that speaks for and about adolescent migrants. Superle analyses the novels *The Roller Birds of Rampur* (1991) by Indi Rana, *Born Confused* (2002) by Tanuja Desai Hidier, and *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* (2005) by Perkins to investigate how the identity crisis of adolescent migrants has been portrayed by various writers of Young Adult Fiction.

In *Cross-Cultural Experiences of the Indian Womanhood through a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (2011), the researcher S.Vasigaran makes his observation that all the women characters of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni shed the tradition of their country of origin. He asserts that Divakaruni portrays the United States as a promising land for women migrants (199).

Datta Nabasree, in *An Assessment of Women Characters and Their Roles in the Development of Nuanced Thematic Patterns in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee* (2016), asserts that women characters migrate to the U.S.A. with the expectation of greater liberty. The study investigates the problems women migrants need to navigate during and after migration.

In *Diaspora and Representation: Reading Gender Identity in the Fictions of Selected South Asian American Women Writers* (2021), Pawar Bhagyashri Shrimant has taken a postcolonial feminist approach in discussing the absence of women's

representations in Third World discourse. Employing South Asian diasporic literature to establish her point, she has chosen writers like Kavita Daswani, an Indo-American writer; Nayomi Munaweera, a Sri-Lankan-born American writer; and Nafisa Haji an American Muslim of Indo-Pakistani descent. The thesis discusses how the continuation of South Asian practices in the host land causes the subjugation of women. The scholar explains how female subjugation is ensured by making them wear their ethnic costumes. A noteworthy finding of the study is that women chose to assimilate despite the restrictions put on them.

The article “Generational Conflicts and Cultural Identity in Perkins’ *You Bring the Distant Near*” by Janet Maria Rodrigues and A. Lourdusamy is a discussion on the generational conflicts within an immigrant family. Another article, “Indian Adolescent Girls and Quest for Personal Identity in the Selected Novels of Perkins”, by Janet Maria Rodrigues and Kusuma D’sa, explores the identity crisis experienced by Indian adolescent migrants. The investigation is based on the novels *The Rickshaw Girl* and *The Secret Keeper*.

A comprehensive literature review highlights that many studies have focused on the challenges faced by South Asian women migrants in their country of settlement. Several studies also establish the emancipatory nature of diasporic spaces. However, an extensive review of the literature reveals that certain aspects demand further investigation to understand the exact position of women migrants in diasporic space. Moreover, most literary works on diasporic themes and research in diasporic studies have focused on the challenges faced by women migrants as seen through the perspective of women characters. However, this study will be analysing gender discrimination as experienced and perceived by adolescent girls and their role in resisting the discrimination shown against them, as well as other female migrants

around them. It has come to the understanding that research that evinces the resistance aspect of migrant adolescent girls in South Asian diasporic studies is limited. Despite the challenges they face in the diasporic space, they resist the discrimination shown towards them and try to attain gender equality. The role played by adolescent girls in overcoming the gender discrimination they face in the country of settlement has received little attention from researchers. Many writings speak about the cultural baggage of the ancestral country being carried to the host land. However, the taunting comments of women in terms of their skin tone by the members of their community and the consequent emotional struggles women migrants undergo have received less attention from diasporic scholars. Perkins explores how the lives of women are made complicated by other members of their community, by making judgments on their skin tone and beauty.

As research in South Asian migrant studies is still evolving, not many South Asian theorists have contributed to the variety of issues relevant to women of the Indian subcontinent. Though Perkins has made a significant contribution to diasporic literature, limited studies have been made on her works. The gender aspect in her novels is an unexplored area. A thorough reading of Perkins' novels shows that, though the female characters are marginalised, many of them become successful in their resistance to the discrimination targeted against them. The author explores a broader scope of issues, including racism, colourism, patriarchy, and several concerns of women in diasporic space, which makes her works unique. All the novels studied in this research are narrated from the perspective of adolescents. However, the works expose the marginalised position of women of different ages and different generations.

Chapter Bifurcation

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 “Introduction” provides a framework for the subsequent chapters in the thesis. The chapter explains certain key words like “generation”, “acculturation”, among others, that are used in the analysis chapters. The opening chapter also includes a thorough literature review.

Chapter 2 discusses the diasporic experiences of women migrants as portrayed by Perkins in the novel *The Not-So-Star- Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*. Pressure on women to be the torch-bearers of ancestral culture is a major concern discussed in this part of the thesis. This chapter is an attempt to prove the idea that women migrants suffer more owing to their gender rather than their race. The novel focuses on the lives of two women migrants, Sunita, the eponymous character, who belongs to one and a half generations as a migrant, and her mother, Ranee Sen, a first-generation migrant. Perkins touches upon the racial discrimination they face at the diasporic space, while the focus is on the challenges they face owing to their gender. The chapter analyses the efforts taken by Sunita to help herself and her mother to overcome their marginalised position in diasporic space.

Chapter 3 explores the diasporic experiences of women characters in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*. The chapter examines the shifts in the diasporic experiences of women migrants as the generations progress. The chapter also attempts to understand whether women migrants of higher generations enjoy greater liberty than their primary-generation counterparts. This part of the thesis also examines the role of adolescent girls in helping other female family members to emerge from their secondary status.

Chapter 4 analyses the novels *Extreme American Makeover* and *White House Rules* in the *First Daughter* series. In the series, Perkins demonstrates the lives of South Asians settled in the U.S.A., with a special focus on the life of Sameera, a Pakistani girl adopted by a white couple. The chapter is an attempt to explore the diasporic experiences of the teenage girl Sameera, whose marginalisation is a consequence of the intersection of race, gender, age, religion, and her Pakistani roots. The chapter investigates various challenges faced by Sameera and the ways she overcomes them.

Chapter 5 of the thesis recapitulates the primary arguments presented in the preceding chapters and records the findings of the study. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the present study.

Chapter 6 “Recommendations” outlines future research directions that will help the researchers identify the research gap. The chapter also discusses the theoretical frameworks that can extend the scope of further study.

Chapter 2

Women Migrants in the Diaspora: Gender Dynamics and Culture

Preservation

“The most pertinent problems faced by the women in the Indian diaspora arise out of issues of gender discrimination and patriarchy” (Pande, “Conceptualising Indian Diaspora” 63).

A critical analysis of the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled-Life of Sunita Sen* (*NSSLSS*), written by Mitali Perkins, is undertaken in this chapter. The chapter identifies the challenges faced by Indian migrants in a white-dominant country. Many challenges faced by the female characters in the novel are common to all migrants regardless of their gender. However, the novel focuses on female characters, probably to expose the simultaneous pressure they endure due to the prevalent sexism and racism in diasporic space. Therefore, there is no attempt to undervalue the problems encountered by male migrants. The chapter seeks to understand how the migratory experiences of females vary from those of males because of the cultural baggage the migrants carry to the country of settlement.

Amba Pande, in her “Women in the Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation”, states that: “Although Indian culture in reality is immensely diverse and heterogeneous with no uniform template, the patriarchal social order tends to dominate the overarching frame” (7). India is a land of diversity, characterised by different cultures, languages, religions and even climate. Though culture varies from region to region within India, patriarchy is a shared feature across the country. Patriarchy is a universal constant; however, its manifestations are more stringent in South Asian countries. This study explores whether the clutches of patriarchy over South Asian

women migrants loosen in diasporic space. The current study makes a compelling observation on challenges faced by women in diasporic spaces due to their gender; it investigates how women are forced to reflect stereotypical roles and how this makes their migratory experiences different from those of men. Gender discrimination is a pervasive issue that affects both women and adolescent girls. Therefore, it is not only adult women migrants but also adolescent girl migrants suffer in terms of gender. A further exploration will be made to understand the resilience and coping mechanisms employed by adolescent girl migrant characters in the narratives of Perkins, along with the discrimination directed at them and other female migrants.

The novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled-Life of Sunita Sen* provides a glimpse into the life of the Sen family², long-time American residents with roots in India. The two female migrant characters include Sunita, an adolescent girl, and her mother, Ranee. Sunita's sister, Geeti, is not brought into the limelight in the story. The story is presented from Sunita's perspective. It is evident that Ranee has acculturated at a level comparable to that of "1.5 generation" (Rumbaut 1167). Thus, the family has achieved "consonant acculturation" (Portes and Rubén 53 - 54).

The opening lines of the novel, "Sunita slammed her locker shut. She was going to be late to social studies, but she desperately needed some time alone. Liz would save her a seat. Bathroom stalls were the only private places in the entire junior high school" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 3), has set the ambience for the novel - Sunita's emotional struggles caused by the arrival of her maternal grandparents from India. Their arrival transformed her mother into a traditional Indian woman, which made Sunita emotionally distressed. Thus, with the arrival of Sunita's grandparents, the family underwent a profound transformation, which in turn took a heavy emotional toll on Sunita. The novel also focuses on the life of Sunita's mother, Ranee, who is forced to keep up the Indian

culture. Sunita, who belongs to the subsequent generation, is also expected to retain their ancestral culture. This bildungsroman novel portrays how a migrant teenage girl overcomes an identity crisis, which stems from the racism and sexism in the country of settlement. The narrative also demonstrates how Sunita helps her mother to overcome her marginalised position due to her gender.

Internalisation of White Supremacy by Non-Whites

Whiteness is always associated with purity, goodness, and innocence, while blackness is associated with evil (Delgado and Stefancic 85), and this notion is very much instilled in the social mindset. As Stuart Hall says in his “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, “Not only, in Said’s ‘Orientalist’ sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as Other” (236). Here, Hall asserts how the Orientals see themselves as inferior to the whites. The imperialistic idea that the East is uncivilised while the West is civilised, sophisticated, and thus supreme, is so ingrained into the psyche of society that even non-whites acknowledge the supremacy of white culture. This imperialistic doctrine of white supremacy has had far-reaching consequences, and its grip on society has not loosened yet. Though the desire to assimilate into mainstream culture is evident among non-white migrants, it is not just the desire to adapt to the hegemonic culture of the newly occupied space that prompts the non-white migrants to accept the white culture; rather, it is the notion that the white culture is sophisticated, which motivates the non-white migrants to assimilate.

Whites refuse to accept the contributions made by Indians and Arabs in the fields of Mathematics and architecture, among others. In her essay, “Racism and Feminism”, bell hooks discusses the propaganda made by whites that the black people

were enslaved following the biblical curse of Ham, in which God himself declared that they were appropriate to do labour-intensive jobs (373). Thus, the whites legitimise their supremacy through religious texts as well. However, as already discussed, they could not justify it with scientific reasons.

Hamid Dabashi, in his seminal work *Brown Skin White Masks*, speaks at length about the kind of literature that justifies white supremacy and portrays Oriental culture as uncivilised. As Dabashi puts it, there is a vast “body of literature, best represented by *Reading Lolita in Tehran*” (69 – 70) that portrays Islam as evil and as a religion that does not value women (70). Thus, American warmongers justify their war against terrorism as a method of rescuing Muslim women from their men, which reminds us of the justification of British imperialism that claimed, “white men saving brown women from brown men”, as Gayathri Spivak examines in her seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Dabashi 69). The Western world always tends to encourage non-white writers who portray the Oriental world in a derogatory way. Any discourse that belittles the Oriental culture or testifies to Western supremacy has always been encouraged by Western society. This can be interpreted as the attempt of whites to confirm the notion that their culture is superior.

The inferiority complex of Blacks owing to their race is clear when Fanon quotes from the report made by Louis T. Achille on the Interracial Conference of 1949, in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the report, Achille shares his observation of interracial marriages, thus:

Insofar as truly interracial marriage is concerned, one can legitimately wonder to what extent it may not represent for the coloured spouse a kind of subjective consecration to wiping out in himself and in his own mind the colour prejudice

from which he has suffered so long. It would be interesting to investigate this in a given number of cases and perhaps to seek in this clouded motivation the underlying reason for certain interracial marriages entered into outside the normal conditions of a happy household. Some men or some women, in effect, by choosing partners of another race, marry persons of a class or a culture inferior to their own, whom they would not have selected as spouses in their own race and whose chief asset seems to be the assurance that the partner will achieve denaturalisation and (to use a loathsome word) “deracialization.” Among certain people of colour, the fact that they are marrying someone of the white race seems to have overridden every other consideration. (Fanon 71-72)

Their intense longing to marry a white person shows that they consider themselves inferior to whites.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes how Professor Westermann’s book *The African Today* portrays the inferiority complex of the Blacks. Fanon points out that Westermann’s work particularly examines how this inferiority complex haunts an educated black man and also explores the strategies he takes to overcome the feeling (25). A learned black man, who is exposed to the white culture, always tries to use bombastic expressions whenever he uses a European language (25). A learned black man even imitates European dress styles. His acceptance of white supremacy is also reflected in the way he furnishes his home. These efforts by black men reveal their yearning to achieve equality with whites. Several novelists have portrayed this kind of acceptance of white superiority by Blacks. The character Eugene in the novel *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie is a typical example of an educated black person who admires the white culture and subscribes to the idea of white supremacy.

A comprehensive reading of Indian diasporic writers, including Perkins, demonstrates that South Asians are also grappling with a similar kind of inferiority complex. Many of the characters in Perkins' novels initially seem to consider white culture as superior. Sunita's grandparents are good at using Indian English. However, Sunita is annoyed to hear her grandmother speaking in English, as her grandmother's accent is Indian, not American. "Sunita winced at her grandmother's thick Indian accent. Bergman's Swedish accent in *Casablanca* sounded so...cultured. Why couldn't the Sens have been from France or Belgium or some place that produced sophisticated accents?" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 23). Sunita considers the Indian accent to be unsophisticated, while the European or American accent is perceived as refined. Her perception can be attributed to her strong belief that whatever belongs to the whites is superior. Sunita is merely a representative of the majority of the South Asian diasporic community settled in white dominant countries, who strongly acknowledge the cultural superiority of whites.

In the novel, when Sunita's mother Rancee goes out in a saree, with a "red dot" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 20) on her forehead, she is scorned by a group of children belonging to the hegemonic community, thus:

"Hey, you guys," one of them said. "That lady's got the evil eye on her forehead. Let's get out of here before we get cursed!" Laughing and screeching, they had run out of the store and down the street. Sunita had escaped to the car, vowing never to be seen with Mom until she looked normal again". (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 21)

This incident has intensified Sunita's feeling that Indian culture is exotic and inferior. She also vowed that she would never accompany her mother "until she looks normal again!" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 22).

As an adolescent girl who had been brought up in Western culture, Sunita is unable to comprehend the Indian cultural norms. She was in an undeclared relationship with her classmate Michael. Rane's strict 'no' for bringing boys home causes trouble in Sunita's relationship with Michael. The novelist details her crisis thus:

Her grandmother and grandfather were so ... different. And Michael was so...well, so *normal*. Look at the way her grandmother pinched Liz's cheeks when Liz came over. Liz was thirteen, for heaven's sake. Too big for cheek pinching. She'd die if her grandmother pinched Michael's cheek or patted him on the head. Liz was different- she'd been around for ages. There was no way Sunita was going to let Michael meet her grandparents, and Mom's request only made things easier. (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 14)

Sunita compares her recently Indianized home with Michael's, which has been newly redecorated. Sunita is too Westernised, so that her home, which has been lately decorated in Indian style, is beyond her comprehension. At the same time, Michael's home with "Empty white walls with simple etchings of seashells and sailboats...spotless white carpet... A baby grand piano" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 19) seems perfect to her, as she is used to this mode of decoration. Sunita was brought up in America, with no connection to her ancestral land, except for her parents, who have also assimilated into the hegemonic culture of the country in which they reside. Consequently, Indian practices seem exotic to Sunita. She compares her family with Michael's as: "People like the Morrisons and Schaeffers were made of apple pie and

country clubs and stained glass windows and pot roast. The Sens were made of chicken curry and sarees and sitar music and incense” (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 83), which reflects her disdain for her ancestral culture. Once, when Michael suggested going to Sunita’s home, she excused herself by saying:

“Uh...I’m kind of busy for the rest of the day, Michael. I’ve got to go home and get stuff ready for school.”

“What do you have to get ready for the first day?” And then he’d turned and looked into her eyes. “What’s wrong, Sunni? You’re sure acting funny. Don’t you want me to come over?”. (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 14-15)

Sunita could not tell him that her mom had asked her not to bring any boys to their home until her grandparents get used to the Western culture. Sunita worried that Michael would find these new rules at Sunita’s home odd and that he would judge the Sen family as conservative. Her assessment of Indian culture as an inferior one made her maintain a distance from Michael. In the beginning, she did not reveal to Michael the new norms introduced by her mother because she thought that would put down the Sen family and would make “the Sen family seem as though they belonged to another century or maybe a different planet” (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 15). Although Sunita loves Michael, her inferiority complex related to her race and ancestral culture prevents her from revealing her feelings. Thus, she struggles with her racial identity and the inferiority complex. Sunita is also convinced that Michael is in love with LeAnn, as their families share similar cultural backgrounds. LeAnn’s “blond hair, blue eyes, and perfect body” (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 84) greatly troubles Sunita, as she considers LeAnn, a classmate of Sunita and Michael, a competitor for Michael’s affection. People of colour who face racism seem to be very much concerned about their racial features.

This is reflected in the writings of people of colour. Toni Morrison, in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, speaks about a girl of colour named Pecola who yearns to possess blue eyes so that she resembles whites. Perkins demonstrates that South Asians also accept the racial features of whites as the hallmark of beauty. Though Sunita is initially reluctant to share her feelings for Michael or about her inferiority complex related to her race, one day she suddenly bursts out her feelings to him. Sunita tells Michael that he and LeAnn “are so much alike”, and they themselves do not have much in common (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 85-86).

Despite being annoyed at her mother’s idea of banning her friends of the opposite gender from visiting their home during her grandparents' visit, Sunita is happy that none of her friends will ever have a chance to meet her grandparents. Sunita’s notion of normalcy can be attributed to her internalisation of Western supremacy. The entire story of the novel revolves around Sunita’s self-doubt, stemming from her inferiority complex regarding her racial identity. Her mother’s sudden transformation also makes her perceive the distinctiveness of her culture from the culture of her friends, which makes her estranged from her peer group.

The recent Indianization of her home is what made Sunita aware of the cultural differences between her family and Michael’s. Her family had been assimilated and was culturally indistinguishable from Michael’s family. The recent exposure to Indian culture heightened her consciousness of her racial identity. This prompts her to compare American culture with her ancestral culture, and she finds her ancestral culture is something inferior. This is one of the main reasons for her sudden retraction from her peer group. It is understood that Sunita used to get along well with her classmates before she became aware of her ancestral culture. Sunita’s exposure to Indian culture,

which she finds inferior, is what strains her relationship with Michael and her classmates.

However, towards the end of the novel, she realises that no culture is inferior to another. This realisation helps her to accept her hybrid identity, which, in turn, brings about an emotional balance within her.

Ghettoisation and Racial Discrimination

Migrants prefer to live together in a particular geographical location, and this process is known as ghettoisation. This tendency to stay close to a co-ethnic community can be attributed to their earnest interest in preserving their ancestral culture. This ghetto mentality is often criticised as an adjustment issue. An unknown environment can cause anxiety for anyone. Living in areas where many co-ethnics reside can provide them with a sense of comfort in the newly settled land. Migrants prefer to reside in regions inhabited by co-ethnic people, and they yearn to retain their ethnicity, but also because they are worried about the risk of becoming a victim of racial harassment. Sometimes, the ghettoisation sprouts from the ill-experiences of racism or hate crimes shared with them by those who have settled in the host land before them. Thus, fear of falling prey to racial crimes is one of the reasons for the ghettoisation. Still, it is interpreted as their “natural tendency to want to stick together” (Connolly 13). Regardless of the efforts taken by non-whites to connect with the white community, the whites are reluctant to reciprocate the same attitude. Even if a non-white migrant possesses a British/American passport, non-whites are treated as outsiders. Thus, the ghetto mentality of non-whites cannot be fully seen as their unwillingness to mingle with whites, but it also demonstrates the racial prejudices of white people.

In the novel, when Sunita and Illana, Sunita's classmate with African ancestry, walked together, they heard a loud whisper, "Check it out-the colored girls stick together" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 79). The incident goes thus:

Both girls kept walking, but each knew the other had heard. They passed a phone booth, and Sunita stopped beside it, fumbling in her purse for change.

"Uh – I just remembered I need to make an urgent phone call, Ilana," she said.

"You go on. I'll be there in just a bit."

Ilana stopped too. "Do you want me to wait, Sunni?" she asked. Her voice was calm, as though nothing had changed.

"No, thanks," Sunita mumbled. "This may take a while."

She [Ilana] looked up and saw the other girl's eyes filled with scorn. Giving Sunita a perfect modelling smile -lips only, no eyes-Ilana walked away.
(Perkins, *NSSLSS* 79-80)

The only common factor between them is that both girls are non-whites. Their cultures are entirely dissimilar owing to their different countries of origin. Still, they are categorised together under the label "colored girls". Illana was not a close friend of Sunita. They are classmates, and it was by chance that they were together on that day. Despite the differences in their racial and cultural backgrounds, their togetherness was interpreted through a racial lens. This incident points to the fact that "people of colour sticking together" is not always a natural tendency. Such comments are unmistakably acts of "microaggression" (Pierce 66). This racial remark hurt both their sentiments, and thereafter, Sunita tried to keep away from Illana. Sunita's distancing herself from Illana exemplifies how profoundly she was affected by the racial remark.

Generational Differences in Achieving Ethnic Identity and the Psychological Health of the Adolescents

“Ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group” (Phinney and Ong 52). Immigrants across the first three generations actively explore and define their ethnic identity. Migrants should come to terms with their ethnicity and culture. At the same time, they need to be acculturated too. At the acculturation stage, migrants learn the language and lifestyle of the mainstream community. The level of adaptation of the first generation exerts a considerable influence on the adaptation rate of the second generation. The question of ethnicity and identity is something that puts the migrants in a dilemma and causes mental pressure. The extent to which a migrant achieves a balance between the two cultures, rather than remaining stagnated by cultural conflicts, determines their success in the newly occupied space. The process of integration begins with the first generation and continues through succeeding generations. Better integration of the settler generation reduces the difference between immigrants or their descendants and the dominant community in terms of socio-economic factors, residential segregation, and increased political participation.

The better ability of the higher generations to assimilate into the culture of their parental country of settlement is the major reason for the better acceptance. Migrants belonging to 1.5 generations and their descendants are the least exposed to the culture of their ancestors. Many first-generation migrants prefer to live in areas where people of the same ethnicity reside. They also choose workplaces similarly. This ghetto mentality of first-generation migrants cannot be seen in the succeeding generations at an equivalent level. This helps the succeeding generations to form identities that conform to the dominant culture. A large number of first-generation migrants who move from non-English-speaking countries face difficulties in adapting to the new culture due to

their limited English language skills. However, their succeeding generations, being schooled in the country of settlement, do not face this linguistic barrier, thus providing them with a better scope to acculturate.

The first-generation migrants remain true to their ancestral culture in their outlook, while adapting a few traits of the mainstream culture, so that they can survive in the newfound space. However, in the case of the succeeding generations, they are completely Westernised. Still, they are discriminated by the host society, which causes emotional issues for them. First-generation migrants also undergo such discrimination, but their awareness of their Indian ethnicity and identity helps them emotionally to cope with the situations. So, the first generation does not suffer from an identity crisis in the way the succeeding generations do.

While family is a fundamental influence on one's ethnic identity (Phinney and Ong 51), the density of one's ethnic group in the area where one lives, and the ethnic density of schools and workplaces, play a substantial role in forming ethnic identity. Ethnic identity develops in each stage of a migrant's life. The novel reveals that ethnic identity starts to unfold at adolescence, which is also the age at which one begins to be exposed to discrimination and marginalisation in the host society.

The development process is challenging for immigrant children. Adolescents belonging to migrant families grapple with questions of race, ethnicity, and belongingness, which can cause an identity crisis. Like any other child, children belonging to migrant families would also be ignorant about their identity in their childhood. However, as they enter adolescence, their distinction from the dominant community makes them conscious of their identity, and as a result, they struggle with their mixed identities. Also, in adolescence, they become victims of racism, which they

were ignorant of as children. This intensifies their struggle with their race and identity. Overcoming this dilemma is one of the most significant challenges that the next generation of migrants has to deal with in the future.

As Erik H. Erikson states in his “Autobiographic Notes on the Identity Crisis”, “Identity problems sharpen with that turn in puberty when images of future roles become inescapable” (743). As one attains puberty and the associated psychological and physical maturity, one will begin to ponder on what will be his/her responsibilities as they become an adult. This problem can affect adolescent girls more than teenage boys, as they realise that they will be subjugated more as they grow older, which intensifies their emotional struggle. However, all the female characters in Perkins’ novels are portrayed as striving to achieve liberty or gender equality by resisting the discrimination targeted against them.

Adapting to the newly confronted culture is a major challenge for first-generation migrants. Understanding and preserving the cultural values of the ancestral country poses a significant challenge for subsequent generations, as their exposure to the ancestral culture is limited. Women, regardless of their age and generation, constantly face a tug of war between the expectations from their family and co-ethnic members to preserve their culture, and the requirement to live in tune with the hegemonic culture in the host land. A meticulous reading of Perkins’ novels suggests that this is predominantly a female issue.

An in-depth analysis of the narrative demonstrates that higher generation migrants start getting more exposure to racism in their adolescence. Though Sunita does not become subject to hate crimes, she gets exposed to “microaggressions” in several instances. As a girl, she also faces pressure from her family to uphold the ancestral

culture. This causes pressure for her in addition to the “micro assaults” she suffers in the country of settlement.

In “Acculturation-related Conflict across Generations in Immigrant Families”, Amy Marks and colleagues quote the authors Pawliuk and others, when they suggest that the children whose parents are “more assimilated (complete adoption of host culture characteristics and abandonment of native culture) in their acculturation styles had children with fewer internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem” (260). This is very much evident in the character of Sunita. Sunita’s parents were assimilated, and Sunita was emotionally stable. She started suffering emotionally when her mother started practising Indian culture. Also, she understands the subservient position of women in Indian culture. As a girl, she understands that she will be in the same position as she grows older, which makes her empathetic towards her mother and makes her fight for her mother’s cause.

In “Microaggressions: Considering the Framework of Psychological Trauma”, Thema Bryant-Davis asserts that not a single event of microaggression can lead to trauma, but, “extreme stress may be triggered as a result of the cumulative nature of the event, for example repeatedly and consistently being stopped at airport security or always having women of other races grab their purses or jump out of elevators when you enter” (88). Torino and others also, in their “Everything you Wanted to Know about Microaggressions but didn’t Get a Chance to Ask”, state that by becoming a victim of racism repeatedly, these victims may start suffering from depression and other psychological issues and may also become addicted to alcohol (11). Torino and colleagues maintain that repeatedly becoming the target of racism can have a negative impact on one’s self-esteem and even academic performance (11). Studies conducted by Roberts and others among immigrants from various countries demonstrate that people

who have come to terms with their ethnic identity have better self-esteem, while people who have not attained ethnic identity suffer from depression and loneliness (Phinney and Ong 58). Many of these troubles could be found in the eponymous character, Sunita.

Initially, the psychological health of Asian American students was a less-discussed area. Desiree Baolian Qin and Eun Jin Han, in their “The Achievement /Adjustment Paradox: Understanding the Psychosocial Struggles of Asian American Children and Adolescents”, refer to multiple authors as:

On the level of adjustment, Asian American students seem to adjust quite well. In school, they tend to be perceived as quiet and hard-working, rarely causing trouble. Asian Americans are also significantly less likely than other ethnic groups to utilize mainstream psychological services. As a result, teachers and counselors often believe that Asian American students do not have any psychological or social difficulties. (78)

However, Qin and Han uphold the idea that the reality of the mental state of Asian students is contrary to what has been perceived. They make their observation based on two reports (1995, 1997) by the “Center for Disease Control” that states that “Asian American girls 15-24 years of age had higher rates of depressive symptoms and suicide than did Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in the same age group” (78). Perkins has portrayed this emotional instability in the character of Sunita, who struggles to accept her Indian ancestry, which she finds exotic and unsophisticated.

When the novel begins, Sunita and her family have assimilated into the mainstream culture. Sunita excelled in her studies and maintained good relationships with her friends at school until she faced a dilemma about her identity. Her relations

become strained after she gets exposed to Indian tradition through her grandparents. The entire family had been assimilated, which made her life smooth. As a child, Sunita might have been ignorant about the racism that exists in the country of settlement. As she steps into her adolescence, she becomes a victim of many racial prejudices. Torino observes the impact of racism in college campuses on the students, thus:

Hostile racial climates perpetuated through microaggressions on college campuses disrupt students' ability to concentrate and to participate in class discussions. Such disruption inhibits students' ability to learn new material. Moreover, experiencing microaggressions in the classroom has been linked to feelings of invisibility, isolation, and self-doubt, all of which impair one's ability to focus on tasks and solve problems in the classroom. (Torino 11)

Although Sunita is a school student, she experiences situations that create a sense of distance from her peers. After undergoing several instances of racism and facing an identity crisis, she is convinced of the fact that being a hybrid is perfectly alright. This understanding helps her achieve a balance in her life. A strong sense of identity in ethnic terms significantly influences the psychological well-being of immigrants (Phinney and Ong 52).

The "1.5 generation" (Rumbaut 1167) and the subsequent generations are culturally indistinguishable from the hegemonic community. A careful reading of the novel suggests that 1.5 generation migrants suffer emotionally due to their incapacity to attain a balance between adopting the new culture and retaining the ancestral culture. This is evident in the evolution of Sunita's character, as she is an American trapped in an Indian body. She feels she is neither an Indian nor an American. However, the author concludes the novel with a positive note in which Sunita embraces her hybrid identity.

In the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled-Life of Sunita Sen*, Sunita finds the loud Indian music that is played at her home annoying, which is similarly disturbing to their neighbour, who belongs to the hegemonic community. Sunita's irritation at Indian music is suggested by the author thus:

Sunita stopped in the living room to turn down the volume on the stereo. She had heard the Indian music playing half a block away – twanging sitar music that grated on her nerves and made their house sound like a mecca for aging hippies. A grumpy neighbor had already complained three times since Sunita's grandparents had arrived. (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 18)

This suggests that she has been assimilated to the level of the host community. Sunita even tries to figure out how her family would be seen by Michael, even the thought of which makes her frustrated. Sunita's comparison of the way her home has been decorated with that of Michael's also demonstrates the high level of acculturation she has achieved. The majority of migrants who moved as children or adolescents, and the later generations, are inclined toward the host culture. They even lack a proper appreciation for the food habits of their parental country. Sunita is not happy with the new food habits that have been introduced in their home after the arrival of her grandparents. Sunita does not enjoy the Indian curries that her mother has been preparing at home since the arrival of her grandparents. Once, when she found that nothing had been cooked at home, she happily ordered pizza. Sunita's happiness is portrayed by Perkins thus: "Happily, Sunita dialed the number of the pizza parlor down the street. She was getting tired of curry day after day... With the sushi, the pizza, and just the four of them, it seemed like old times" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 61-62). The reintroduction of the food habits they had been following makes her comfortable.

It has been demonstrated that a direct relationship exists between achieving an ethnic identity and good mental health. The settler generation migrants do not suffer much from an identity crisis. It is because these people are somewhat connected to their ancestral country and its culture, and they identify themselves with it. They also exhibit traits of the host culture, which is mandatory for them to survive in the country of occupancy. However, the migrants who belong to one and a half and later generations find it difficult to bring a balance in their identity.

The emotional imbalance experienced by hyphenated teenagers is well portrayed in Perkins' character Sunita. The re-Indianization of her mother, as well as her home, and the "microaggression", traumatise her to a great extent. Consequently, she distanced herself from her peer group. It is the sudden change in the family that put her in a dilemma concerning her identity. Sunita shares her identity crisis with her grandfather, thus:

"Sometimes...Sometimes I wish things in my life were more predictable," she said finally. "But they're not. I'm like a wild new experiment. Like somebody's taken a few elements that are Indian and a few that are American and some that are just me, Sunita Sen. And they've mixed them all together and are waiting to see what in the world will come out... I wish Mom and Dad had stayed in India. Then I would be one hundred per cent Indian, like those cousins Didu is always bragging about. Or if I had been born here and had been American- I mean really American-you know, born-in- the-U.S.A. and all that patriotic land-where-my-fathers- died stuff. Maybe then life would be less complicated. (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 87-88)

This emotional conflict concerning her identity is the root cause of the uneasiness in her relationship with her family.

The dilemma of one's own identity as experienced by an adolescent migrant is portrayed in the character of Sunita. Throughout the novel, we see that the teenager struggles to accept her hybrid identity. As seen through the eyes of Sunita, everything was perfectly alright until the arrival of her maternal grandparents. With their arrival, Sunita's mother, Rancee, begins to adopt Indian ways, having assimilated at a level comparable to Sunita's, who is a one-and-a-half-generation immigrant. This unexpected turn of events put pressure on Sunita. Finally, Sunita surmounts the difficulties by welcoming Indian culture and accepting her hybrid identity.

Racism and Education

“Critical race theory is an intellectual and social movement and a loosely organised framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color” (Duignan). According to Critical Race theorists, racism is an ordinary part of the everyday experience of people of colour in the US (Delgado and Stefancic 8). Thus, parents should make their children aware of various forms of racism so that they can defend themselves from racial oppression.

In “Racism and Feminism”, hooks asserts that nothing will change as long as black children are taught in school to admire and love the very government that segregates Blacks (374). Paul Connolly, in his *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children*, states that the experiences of children within their local community and schools, which represent the policies of the entire nation, shape their perspective of

“race, gender and sexuality” (28). The groundbreaking essay, “Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors”, by Rudine Sims Bishop, speaks about the importance of inclusive literature³, in which non-white children can also see themselves in literature, just the way white children can see their images in literature. Bishop states that even though reading cannot eradicate poverty or racial issues, it can help people understand each other. Bishop concludes his essay saying, “When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human”. Vidya Mandarani and Ahmad Munir in their paper “Incorporating Multicultural Literature in EFL Classroom”, discusses the importance of including multicultural literature in the curriculum. They assert that “The lack of multicultural literature in classroom activities may lead to urgent social issues today (e.g. racism)” (4). Thus, an education system that includes inclusive literature plays a significant role in inculcating ideas related to race.

It is important to teach children about racial equality. The seeds of racism are sown right from school days. The author highlights the failure of education in inculcating racial equality in the novel, as seen in the instance where Sunita’s teacher, Riley, asks each of his students to discover their roots (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 9). Already struggling with an identity crisis, Sunita was deeply troubled by this task assigned by her teacher. Riley also comments that “most of the world does not have white skin and European roots” (9). Such remarks made by the teachers can increase the children’s sensitivity to racial distinctions. Children become racially conscious and involuntarily get involved in ‘othering’. Though Riley does not degrade any race, he does not teach them the importance of racial equality. He neither tries to make his students understand the fallacies surrounding the concept of racism nor prepares them to accept the

differences. On the other hand, the way he explains different races makes his students realise that the class is not a single, homogeneous group of Americans, but rather a small unit of society, consisting of people from various countries with diverse cultures. Such an approach to the topic can bring disunity among the students. It can also have long-lasting effects on children hailing from families of minority groups. Being subjected to racial remarks at a very tender age can cause emotional issues for the victim. Thus, reforming the education system in a way that enables children to understand the importance of racial equality is very important.

Women as Cultural Transmitters

Settlement in a new country necessitates migrants to undergo a process of cultural adjustment. Adaptation to the host culture helps migrants gain acceptance from the host society. A better level of integration also helps a migrant climb the social ladder. Regardless of such circumstances, most migrant families compel female members to retain their ethnic values. On the contrary, nobody expects a migrant man to maintain his ethnic culture. In contrast, women face a constant tussle between retaining the cultural practices of their ancestral land and acquiring the cultural values of the host land.

In her *Negotiating Identities*, Aparna Rayaprol says, “Gendered behaviour among the immigrants is rooted in the ideology that they have carried with them to the new society” (108). Amba Pande, in her “Women in the Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation”, also observes that women in India are immensely controlled by a set of “belief systems that are ingrained in historical antecedents and mythical/religious narratives. Patriarchy, power hierarchies and gendered perspectives are the fundamentals of these narratives” (7). The migrants try to conform to the

patriarchal norms that they have internalised from their homeland. Initially, at the time of settlement in a new space, there are chances for hardening the notions about gender roles and traditions, making things more complicated for women. The subjugation of women is vital in constructing and retaining ethnic values, especially in diasporic spaces. Nadjie Al-Ali, in “Diasporas and Gender”, says, “the control of women’s bodies and sexualities is key in the context of ethnic and national communities, especially when in flux” (120). Women are expected to maintain their ethnic values as female family members are entrusted with the responsibility of passing on the value system to subsequent generations.

Ranee had been an assimilated woman like other members of their family. Nonetheless, with the arrival of Ranee’s parents, everything changed. Ranee, who used to wear tailored suits and blouses to the local junior college where she taught Chemistry, availed leave from her college and also started wearing sarees every day. As Sunita recollects, “Mom had never worn sarees before *they* arrived. She’d taught chemistry at the local junior college in tailored suits and blouses. But now she was on leave to stay home with her parents during their year-long visit. And she wore sarees every day to make *them* feel more at home” (Perkins, *NSSLSS*, 12). Ranee’s decisions show her keenness to prove to her parents that her exposure to American culture has not compromised her traditional values.

Sunita could not accept her mother’s transformation and resisted her mom wearing sarees. “But you are more comfortable in jeans! ...It’s more you” (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 12). However, Ranee Sen defends her decision, saying she is very at ease in sarees. The conversation goes thus:

“Sarees are very comfortable,” ... “Besides, it makes your grandparents happy to see I haven’t changed that much, and I think it makes your old-fashioned dad happy too.”

“There is nothing as lovely and graceful on a woman as a saree,” her dad said, peering over his newspaper to admire the green silk one his wife was wearing. (Perkins, *NSSLSS*, 13)

It is distressing to understand that such expectations of women come even from their parents. Ranees' parents want her to wear sarees and be a traditional Indian wife in every sense. However, they are not concerned whether their son-in-law retains their ethnic culture. It is because women are considered the embodiments of culture. Women of the primary generations are restricted in many ways as they are expected to represent the ethnic culture. Sunita's grandmother wants her to appear Indian by wearing a saree and jewels, “I brought you a beautiful new saree from India to wear, Bontu, ... And gorgeous jewels and gold bangles. Everybody will admire you” (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 113). Thus, even Sunita, a one-and-a-half-generation migrant, is compelled to wear a saree. Though the first-generation women migrants are forced to retain their ancestral culture, it continues for a few generations, and things become easier only for women of very higher generations.

Migrants are often caught between cultures. However, women suffer more as they are easily identified in terms of their ethnicity through their dress, language, and behaviour. Women are expected to wear traditional attire, whereas men are not. Nobody is bothered when a man wears trousers or jeans. However, when a South Asian woman wears such unconventional costumes, other members of the same community start questioning. So, even in a Western nation, they are answerable for their actions to other

members of their community. Rayaprol is a theorist who has explored the conditions of Indian women in diasporic space and spoken at length on the pressure of cultural reproduction thrust upon migrant women. In her *Negotiating Identities*, she observes the reason why women in diasporic space are supposed to wear traditional dress while men are not, thus:

Since men in urban India do not often dress traditionally (in a dhoti, for example), the boys are not expected to either. Women and girls in India, in contrast, are typically dressed in traditional attire, mostly saris and salwar Kameez, and are only occasionally seen wearing skirts or jeans. While many Indian immigrant women may wear Western dress to work, they often continue to wear traditional clothes at home and for community gatherings. This dress code symbolises the reality that immigrant women more than men, are considered the custodians of religious and cultural tradition. (78)

This expectation becomes very evident in the diasporic space because in the settlement country, migrants become more ethnically conscious. They want their subsequent generations to understand and follow their ancestral culture. This responsibility is vested on the shoulders of women. While having their first meals after Ranees' parents joined them in the US, Ranees' mother scolded her for not serving food to her husband. "For shame, Ranees, ... "You've forgotten that a good Indian woman fills her family members' plates *before* they have to ask" (Perkins, *NSSLSS* 99). A migrant woman is thus very often reminded by people around her about her gender roles. These compulsions cause undue stress for women migrants.

Ranees is a working woman. However, she lost her promotion since she took a one-year leave, which she did to make a favourable impression on her parents during

their visit. Ranee's parents expected her to be a conventional Indian woman who takes proper care of her family. She knows that she cannot be a great homemaker if she chooses to pursue her career. Arun Sen, her husband, also does not encourage her to pursue her career during her parents' stay. Thus, a woman who pursues her dream is considered unconventional and is pulled back from moving up the career ladder by being told that how a 'good' woman should behave.

An Indian migrant woman is supposed to remain a docile, submissive wife in diasporic space as well. Though nobody pays attention to Arun's adaptation, Ranee is frequently reminded of her duties as a "good wife". What this study demonstrates is that the form of gender norms that are followed in India is expected to be followed in the diasporic space as well. Thus, migration does not emancipate Indian women from the steadfast norms of patriarchy followed in India even after settlement in a foreign land.

Effects of Migration on the Relationship between Family Members of Different Generations

Mary C. Waters and Marisa Gerstein Pineau argue in their book *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* that immigrants hold a significantly more positive stance toward the American Dream than the native-born (332). "In 2014, almost 70 per cent of immigrant parents said their children will prosper relative to themselves" (Waters and Pineau 247-248). Thus, the migrants believed that only their children would realise the "American dream" (Adams). These migrants continue to reside in the receiving country to ensure a promising future for their children and later generations. Migration is closely tied to the family in several ways. Male family members often migrate to provide economic support to their family members. Sometimes, female

family members also become the primary breadwinners. Most women migrate to join their husbands who work abroad. Thus, people migrate for the sake of their families.

The consequences of migration are very often reflected in the relationships among the family members who have migrated. Intergenerational issues are prevalent among migrant family members. As previously discussed, parents who were raised in their ancestral land are generally more familiar with its culture. Though the children are born in their ancestral land, they spend their childhood and adolescence, the age span during which a person's character is formed, more in the parental country of settlement. Naturally, they are more familiar with the host culture. Parents, compared to their children, receive less exposure to the host culture. First-generation migrants face difficulties in assimilating, so they often choose to maintain their ethnic identity by adapting very little, as this is required for their survival in the new place. As a result, there will be a huge disparity in the culture of immigrant parents and immigrant children. This causes strains in the parent-child relationship and are more commonly seen in mother-daughter relationships. The lack of proficiency in the language of the dominant community among first-generation immigrants also results in the supremacy of 1.5-generation or second-generation immigrants, as the later generations have a better command of the language used by the dominant community in the host country. This results in the loss of parental control over their children. Such migrant families, where children are more acculturated than their migrant parents, are characterised by “dissonant acculturation” (Portes and Rubén 53). Intergenerational conflicts are more common in families that have undergone “dissonant acculturation” (53). Parents will depend on their children for decision-making and this will result in a reversal of roles, leading to an uneasy relationship between immigrant parents and their children (52-53). In such situations, children are likely to shoulder the responsibilities of their family

because of the poor English communication skills and adaptability level of their parents.

The higher-level adaptation of the children makes parents feel that their children are too Americanized. In contrast, the comparatively lower degree of assimilation of parents makes children think that their parents are too conventional in their perspective and approach. Studies confirm that the cultural differences between adolescents and their immigrant parents provide a basis for strain in their relationship (Qin and Han 83). It is understood that Sunita's parents were also assimilated, on par with their children's level of assimilation, thus demonstrating "consonant acculturation" (Portes and Rubén 53). It can also be inferred that, although the family had adopted Western culture to a great extent, the Sens family remained a closely-knit one until the arrival of Sunita's grandparents. Ironically, attempts to re-Indianize the Sen family cause trouble in their relationships. Sunita is utterly incapable of understanding Raneer's effort to be 'Indian', which she made to please her parents. Sunita cannot agree with Raneer when she wears Indian costumes. Sunita is also not ready to accept Raneer's decision to avail leave from the local junior college, where she teaches Chemistry. Raneer does all these things to please her parents. Sunita had been ignorant of Indian tradition. As it is evident from the novel, she is the only Indian in her class. Therefore, her only connection with her ancestral land has been her parents. Raneer was also progressive in her thoughts and Westernised in her costumes till the arrival of her parents, Thus, there was nothing around Sunita that connected her with Indian culture. Usually, it is the disparity in the degree of assimilation of different generations that causes intergenerational conflict within a family.

A thorough dissection of the novel suggests that the Sen family had never before faced such an issue due to the seemingly consonant acculturation mode they had

adopted, or rather, a higher level of assimilation within the entire family. The changes Raneer brought about in her dressing style also caused worries for Sunita. When Raneer went out wearing a saree, she was bestowed with compliments by her friends for her unique costumes. However, on the very same day, she was also disgraced by many kids who made racial comments on Raneer's attire. This incident was unbearable for Sunita, and this intensified the friction in the mother-daughter relationship. Sunita even decides not to accompany her mother until she becomes 'normal'. The Indian culture and dressing style are completely abnormal and strange to Sunita. Her parents had adopted the culture of the host nation, and it is the presence of Raneer's parents that makes her re-adopt the Indian ways.

The second and subsequent generations of migrants often choose their partners from the host society. The higher level of assimilation among the higher generations is often cited as the reason for the increase in the rate of interracial marriages among the higher generations than their previous generations. Inter-racial marriages, in turn, contribute to a better level of assimilation. Sunita's choice of Michael shows her high level of assimilation. Her parents never raised any objections to her friendship with boys, or even Michael, who seemed to be a regular visitor at their home, until the events changed. Being well aware of the American culture, Sunita's parents would have easily defined the nature of Sunita's friendship with Michael. This shows Sunita's parents have assimilated on par with the higher generations. Thus, in the novel, the level of assimilation of the first generation and their children is the same.

Sunita's mother warned her against bringing any boys home, only because Sunita's grandparents would not be able to accept cross gender friendships. Otherwise, Sunita's parents had not raised any objections, which can also be attributed to their higher level of assimilation. Hence, the relationship among the members of the Sen

family was good. Only after Ranees started adopting Indian cultural values, problems start. Amy Marks and others in their “Acculturation-Related Conflict across Generations in Immigrant Families”, observe that “the differences between parents’ and children’s acculturation experiences, sometimes referred to as *differential acculturation*, can yield interpersonal parent-child challenges” (258). Parents usually opt to retain their ethnicity, and the children are more accustomed to the culture of the country of settlement and thus find it easy to adapt to the culture of the host land. This makes the parent-child relationship problematic in the country of settlement. Since women are often persuaded to conform to the culture of their homeland and shoulder the responsibility of transmitting its cultural values to the women of succeeding generations, friction is more common in mother-daughter relationships. This is because if daughters deviate from their ethnic culture, their mothers will be held responsible. Moreover, daughters are expected to retain their culture, unlike their brothers. Despite the frictions, women of the settler generation are particularly involved in raising their children by imparting ancestral culture as they are forced to. This makes the mother-daughter relationship more problematic, as in the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled-Life of Sunita Sen*. Being a 1.5-generation migrant herself, Perkins wants to portray characters in the same limelight. Although the emotional conflicts of women migrants are central to her novels, the protagonists of most of her novels are adolescent girls, who deal with their internal struggles because they are caught between cultures. The gender inequalities are being voiced through the adolescent girl characters.

It is of paramount importance that gender plays a vital role in preserving the ancestral culture and transmitting the same to the next generations. The responsibility bestowed upon women to preserve the cultural values of their roots and carrying over to future generations is a crucial factor that contributes to the friction in the mother-

daughter relationship. Arun, Sunita's father, seems to be diplomatic in his ways with Sunita. This is because he is not burdened with the responsibilities of representing their ancestral culture or passing it down to subsequent generations. As a migrant who frequently moved from one country to another during her adolescence, Perkins must have witnessed the complications in mother-child relationships as depicted in her works.

Role of Adolescent Girls in Emerging from Marginalised Position

In the novel, the female characters, regardless of their generational status, are portrayed as struggling due to their gender. On the one hand, they have adapted to the culture of the country of settlement as expected, while on the other hand, they are expected to retain the culture of the country of origin. This conflicting expectation from them makes their adaptation process more difficult than that of male migrants. The acceptance of her hybrid identity was a significant step for Sunita during her adolescent period. The novel ends on a positive note, as she decides to carve out a space for herself in the country of her parents' settlement. Sunita's struggle with her identity is discussed throughout the novel. Her mother, Ranee, is also not a completely liberated woman. Ranee is, in many ways, bound by her family's expectations to retain Indian culture. She is presented as struggling as she is caught between the ancestral culture and the host culture. It is Sunita who stands for her mother to restart her career. Thus, in the context of marginalisation, the marginalised sect can stand together against domination. They lend support to each other to move beyond the margins. Sunita does her best to persuade her grandparents to convince her mother that they are happy to see their daughter working in college. Thus, a sense of camaraderie can be observed among the female migrants in diasporic space, which enables them to move beyond their disadvantaged position. The author suggests "female migrant camaraderie"⁴ as a

solution to the problems they face in the diasporic space. It is the effort made by the adolescent character, Sunita, that becomes fruitful, providing her mother with at least some freedom.

“Aetonormativity”, which is commonly seen in children’s literature (Nikolajeva 8), is absent in the novels of Perkins. Maria Nikolajeva, in her work *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, describes the concept of aetonormativity thus: “the child hero can be as brave, clever and strong as he pleases, but in the end, an adult will take over” (20). Perkins deviates from this common pattern followed in young adult literature by making the adolescent character bolder, who takes the initiative to achieve the goal of emerging from a marginalised position. It is the adolescent character who “takes over” things. The author also does not adhere to the “gender schema” (Bem), which is usually followed in children’s and young adult fiction. The “gender schema” theory proposes that “the developing child invariably learns his or her society’s cultural definitions of femaleness and maleness...As children learn the contents of their society’s gender schema, they learn which attributes are to be linked with their own sex and hence, with themselves” (Bem 603-604). The adolescent character Sunita in the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* does not seem to learn the gender norms. She tries to deviate from this and help herself come out of the difficult situations she faces. Conventionally, male characters are often depicted as engaging in heroic activities. De Beauvoir, in her *The Second Sex*, observes that “women are comrades for each other in captivity, they help each other endure their prison, even prepare their escape: but their liberator will come from the masculine world” (588). Female characters are conventionally portrayed as waiting for the arrival of a Prince Charming who falls in love with their beauty and helps them escape from their imprisonment. However, the female characters in Perkins do not wait for their

male lovers or some “heroes” to rescue them from their marginalised position. They themselves make efforts to escape from their discriminated position. Angela E. Hubler observes in her “Faith and Hope in the Feminist Political Novel for Children: A Materialist Feminist Analysis” that there is no “construction of women as a collectivity” (69), in a way that can empower all of them. Perkins also deviates from this conventional mode of female characterisation. The female characters in Perkins’ novels help themselves and also other female characters, their fellow sufferers, to escape from the marginalised position. Thus, the adolescent girls deviate from the accepted gender norms, which always privilege males. As Kate Millett points out in her *Sexual Politics*, “the female did not develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are the male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture with regard to female were also of male design” (46). Perkins suggests that adolescent girls or women need not conform to the gender norms created by the male world.

As hooks observes in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, marginal spaces can be “much more than a place of deprivation” (230). She states that it can also be “a space of resistance” (230). Even though she proposes this notion while speaking about the marginalisation of Blacks, this can also be applied in the case of South Asian women migrants, who undergo marginalisation owing to their gender and race, and on many other grounds. Whites have always propagated that their culture is superior. However, people who belong to marginalised spaces can produce discourse that supports their culture and denies the supremacy of white culture. Similarly, women migrants who are subjugated due to their race, gender, and other factors can utilise the site of multiple marginalisation as a “site of resistance” (232). To reinstate her point that the space where one can refuse to be dominated lies in the margins, hooks quotes Bob Marley’s song, “We refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and

that's the way it's going to be" (230). The female characters in the fictional world of Perkins convert the "site of deprivation" into "a space of resistance" (230). Though initially Sunita and her mother suffer marginalisation, Sunita resists the discrimination targeted against them and emerges from their marginalised position. Through strong female characterisation, Perkins becomes part of the Indian diasporic writers who produce counterhegemonic discourse that portrays weak non-white women in their writings.

Conclusion

The novel discusses several challenges faced by migrants in diasporic space, which are common to all genders. A comprehensive analysis of the novel suggests that what makes the migratory experience of women more challenging is the constant pressure they face to maintain the culture of their country of origin. Child migrants face racial issues at an adolescent age, which makes their character formation formidable. This is what happens with Sunita as well. Dealing with both racism and the pressure to retain ancestral culture simultaneously put her under immense stress.

Interestingly, Raneer's parents consider only female migrants as cultural harbingers, which is reflected in the pressure they put on Sunita and Raneer to preserve Indian culture. At the same time, Raneer's husband never faces this issue. Arun, who is also familiar with Indian culture, encourages his wife and daughter to practice Indian cultural values, although he himself does not. This pressure to retain Indian culture causes stress even for Raneer, despite her familiarity with the Indian culture. Sunita's unfamiliarity with Indian culture makes it too much for Sunita to handle. Thus, it has been observed that the pressure to represent their ancestral culture poses a significant challenge for women migrants from South Asian countries.

Ranee becomes exhausted due to her ardent effort to present herself as a typical Indian wife to her parents. Sunita helps her mother navigate the challenges of upholding Indian culture. Sunita is brave enough to voice her support for her mother, which enables Ranee to lead the “normal” life she used to have in the country of settlement. Thus, Sunita, the young adolescent girl, helps her mother regain her right to determine her level of adaptation. It is clear that the novel suggests adolescent girls are capable of transforming lives, at least within their families.

The novel has an unexpected conclusion with Ranee cancelling her one-year leave, which she had taken to please her parents. Sunita also started wearing a saree, a garment she had once detested. Notably, for Ranee, the first-generation migrant, it is a “tangible embodiment of the traditions”, while for Sunita, the saree “metamorphoses into a costume” (Sacheti 146). Thus, both female migrants could find their balanced state, which makes them happy.

It is to be noted that the author does not provide any solutions for racism; however, the author concludes the novel by suggesting that in a marginalised space, marginalised people can defend each other’s cause and thus be supportive of one another. It is apparent that their sufferings have not come to an end, but they have started taking efforts to emerge from their marginalised status. The white discourses have always portrayed South Asian women as weak. By portraying strong female characters who refuse to be sidelined, Perkins is producing counter-hegemonic discourse, which serves as her form of resistance. Thus, Perkins’ creative talent can be attributed to the marginalised status that she has suffered in the diasporic space.

An in-depth analysis of the novel has strengthened the idea that Indian women in diasporic spaces suffer more from gender discrimination and patriarchy, as observed

by Amba Pande in her “Conceptualising Indian Diaspora: Diversities within a Common Identity”.

The next chapter will provide a critical analysis of the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*. The changes in the diasporic experiences of women migrants across various generations, as perceived by adolescent girls, will be illustrated in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Female Migrants in Diaspora: A Study across Generations

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (de Beauvoir 273) is a frequently quoted maxim in discussions of gender. Simone de Beauvoir reasserts that gender is a social construction when she says, “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (273). In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir also expounds how society teaches children of different genders to act accordingly (277). Lynn S. Chancer and Beverly Xaveria Watkins, in their work *Gender, Race and Class*, also assert that gender is a social construction when they say: “gender refers to social and cultural interpretations that turn sexual difference into more than a merely biological distinction” (18). These studies affirm that gender is in no way biologically connected; rather, it is a social construction.

In most parts of the world, women are assigned secondary status. Every culture expects women to perform certain roles that make them feminine. As Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics*, puts it, “While patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social, or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale” (25). Thus, Millett points out that gender roles vary with place, but in most of the world, the patriarchal system restricts women through its cultural norms.

This chapter specifically focuses on the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* (YBDN), which unfolds the migratory experiences of five female migrants spanning

three generations of the Das family ². The novel portrays Rane Das, a first-generation woman migrant who forces her husband, Das, to migrate so that she can escape from the confinement of her husband's joint family. The novel illustrates the migratory experiences of Rane, her daughters and granddaughters. The patriarchal norms in South Asian countries restrict women more in all aspects when compared to white women. When people from South Asian countries migrate, they carry the cultural baggage of their ancestral country to the newly occupied space as well.

The novel begins with an incident that is indicative of racism prevalent in Britain. In the opening scene, Sonia, the younger daughter of Das and Rane, participates in a swimming competition organised at the British club. Sonia, then an eight-year-old child, couldn't help but notice that the four Das family members were the only dark-skinned people in the club. It also struck her that other dark-skinned people present were serving refreshments to the club members. She also observes that none of the club members are speaking to the Das family, though they speak briefly to Kwasi, who serves them cold drinks. As Sonia notices, "They [whites] speak briefly to Kwasi, but never to the Indian woman" (Perkins, *YBDN* 4). The word "briefly" suggests that these whites have a formal talk with Kwasi, probably regarding any service the whites need from them. This scene indicates that only a few people of colour occupy high position in the society, while most of the non-whites do low-paid jobs. At the British club, Sonia feels that her family is invisible since no white people talk to any of her family members. Thus, the inaugural scene foreshadows the novel's theme. The scene exposes the discrimination faced by non-whites in the United Kingdom. The rest of the narrative is set in the US. The condition of South Asians in the United States is no better. While all South-Asian migrants undergo several challenges in the country of settlement, which is predominantly white, non-white women migrants are additionally

marginalised owing to their gender. The greatest challenge these women face are primarily caused by people of their own community and sometimes their own families. The novel portrays only a few instances of racism suffered by the migrant family. Instead, the novelist focuses on the troubles caused to female migrants by the people of their ethnic community. Many factors, like taunting them in terms of their beauty and compulsion to keep alive the culture of their homeland in the diasporic space, among others, cause significant challenges to the women migrants. This chapter seeks to understand whether the subsequent generations of female migrants enjoy better liberty. The chapter also sheds light on the various challenges that adolescent girl migrants encounter and how they overcome them.

Oppression of Women as Reflected in Indian Marriages

Although the entire story is set in the United States of America, except for the opening scene, which is set in London, Perkins also draws upon the gender discrimination faced by Indian women in their homeland. In the novel, Das always blames Ranee for forcing him to migrate (Perkins, *YBDN* 13). Ranee opted to relocate to escape from the control of her in-laws. She forced her husband to migrate since she wanted to enjoy absolute liberty. The Das family initially migrated to the United Kingdom; however, Das was not able to secure a well-paid job. However, he used to send money to his parents. This infuriated her since they were financially struggling. When Das said that his salary would be raised soon, Ranee furiously responded, saying, “So you can send more money to Calcutta? I thought we were saving for a house” (Perkins, *YBDN* 46). Das sends money to Calcutta because his mother is sick (46), but Ranee is not convinced. This reflects how the limited career prospects for a South Asian migrant in diasporic space and the ensuing financial instability cause friction between a husband and wife in a migrant family.

Sonia often wonders why her mother does not try to understand her father the same way Tara, her elder sister, and she do (Perkins, *YBDN* 16). Sonia realised the fact that her mother was just eighteen when she got married, and Baba was given three choices of possible brides, but her mother was given none (Perkins, *YBDN* 16). Thus, even Das did not seem to have a voice in choosing his life partner. The right to voice an opinion was even less for Ranee. She was not given any choices to select her husband. Thus, Sonia infers that the adjustment issue Ranee has with her husband and his family is probably because of her inability to choose her partner. Thus, the author portrays the Indian marriage system in which women have absolutely no freedom to choose their life partner or to voice their opinions. Sonia, having been brought up in the UK and the US, is very much influenced by Western culture. In India, marriages are arranged between families. She could not understand the way marriage proposals were matched in India. On the first day of their meeting, Ranee was made to serve tea and to sing a song. As Das puts it, “Hearing her sing ‘Utal Dhara Badal Jhare’ when we first met took my breath away” (Perkins, *YBDN* 27). Sonia recollects what she has heard about her parents’ first meeting thus:

“Starry and I have heard how our parents met before their marriage, chaperoned by our grandparents in Ma’s living room. Our parents didn’t speak to each other, but Ma served tea, sang that Tagore song, and- according to Baba’s version- fireworks exploded and a thousand sitars burst into music”. (Perkins, *YBDN* 27)

In Indian marriages, understanding the future partner’s likes and dislikes is not considered crucial. They do not have the freedom to determine whether they will be able to get along with each other. This is because in India, there is no rule of equality between the partners in the institution of marriage. A wife is required to adapt herself according to her husband’s nature. She ought to keep aside her likes and dislikes and

make adjustments according to the preferences of her husband and his family.

Therefore, there is no question whether the relationship will work out or not. In India, wives are expected to make all the compromises.

Oppression of an Indian woman does not end with the misogynistic customs followed in choosing a husband. In India, married women are expected to live with their in-laws, where they cannot express their opinions. They are supposed to obey the head of the family, who is usually the father or elder son. In the novel, Raneer strongly opposes the idea of returning to India, because she will have to stay with her husband's parents and other family members. Raneer does not want to stay with her mother-in-law, who judges her for everything she does. Sonia also does not support the idea of returning to India. She says they will have to stay in a "rented, joint-family flat in the overcrowded city of Calcutta, where Ma's inability to have a son would be a constant subject of conversation for other women" (Perkins, *YBDN* 15). In India, women gain a better voice only as they become mothers to sons.

Women as Cultural Transmitters

Amba Pande, in her "Women in Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation and Relocation", asserts that Indian women usually migrate within the "patriarchal framework and cultural considerations, and are supposed to preserve it" (1). In the country of settlement, women migrants are pressured to represent the cultural norms of their ancestral country. Conventionally, women are entrusted with the responsibility to raise their children and are expected to be the custodians of their ancestral culture. Families expect children to learn about ethnicity from their mothers. Sometimes they are expected to wear their ethnic dress even in the country of settlement, lest they should be judged by the members of their ethnic community.

Women migrants are also required to integrate into the host culture to be welcomed by the mainstream community. Women migrants constantly face a tussle between the expectations to remain ethnic and the requirement to acculturate. Ranees retain her Bengali culture till her prime age. Nowhere does the author portray Das attempting to hold on to his ancestral culture.

Although Das suggests that his wife and children should learn to speak American English, he insists that Tara should learn Bengali music (Perkins, *YBDN* 27). This can be interpreted as his intense desire for his daughters to be raised in Bengali culture. He also suggests that his daughters wear salwar kameez (Perkins, *YBDN* 26). Ranees always has her food alone. In the village where she was brought up, men were served first. The women in South Asian countries have their food together after all the men and children have had theirs. This practice exposes the gender inequality in South Asian countries. They are not supposed to have their food along with the men of their family. Thus, women can have only whatever is left over after the men and children have eaten. Most of the South Asian families continue such practices in the diasporic space for quite an extended period. Society has drawn a clear-cut picture of gender roles in which women are always dominated by men. Such patriarchal practices shape the perspectives of both men and women. Mostly, it is women who enforce such practices. Ranees preserve the cultural practices of their homeland for a long period after migration.

After Das's demise, she also stopped using makeup and jewellery and became a vegetarian. She strictly followed the restrictions thrust upon a Bengali widow even in the diasporic space. As Sonia puts it, Ranees' life as a widow is almost like the age-old practice of Sati. Sonia puts it thus, "In the olden days, widows used to throw themselves on their dead husbands' burning pyres-or were thrown. Disgusting. But isn't that what

Ma is doing, too? Symbolically, anyway” (Perkins, *YBDN* 125). Sonia always wanted her mother to emerge from this shell of widowhood and to lead a normal life. However, Raneer finds it hard to overcome the marginalised status her community has thrust upon her. Her inability to break the shell stems from various factors. From the beginning of the novel, Raneer wears Indian attire. Raneer also started wearing white sarees after Das's demise. This is primarily because the cultural practices of her country are deep-rooted in her mind. In India, widows were expected to remain inside the four walls of their homes and lead a restricted life. A widowed woman was supposed to prove her loyalty to her deceased husband by leading an ascetic kind of life. Any deviation from this practice would have been considered disloyalty towards one's late husband. Secondly, she does not want to be judged by the people of her community for not following the cultural values. In this sense, Raneer is forced to lead a life that renounces all worldly pleasures. Thus, even in the diasporic space, the cultural values of one's land of origin impose restrictions on a woman's life. South Asian cultural practices are abounded with strong patriarchal ideologies (Hussain 29). Raneer has taken a long gap after the demise of Das to get herself normalised with Western culture and outfits. Thus, it is evident in the novel that the female characters carry the burden of preserving the culture of their homeland, while men are free to choose their level of acculturation.

As Sonia believes, widowhood is a “patriarchal prison” (Perkins, *YBDN* 125). The society enforces such restrictions only on women. The patriarchal rules of the homeland continue to restrict South Asian women migrants from enjoying absolute freedom in the diasporic space. Since Sonia is a “1.5-generation” migrant, she is more exposed to the culture of the country of settlement. Thus, Sonia's perspective is not much influenced by the conventional patriarchal system that exists in India. Sonia wants her mother to emerge from the “patriarchal prison” (Perkins, *YBDN* 125).

Later in her life, Ranee converted to Christianity and also acquired American citizenship. She says it is the 9/11 incident that has compelled her to become an American and a Christian. Once she embraced Christianity, she started making non-Bengali friends, who are ignorant of the Bengali traditions that confine a widow (290).

In the novel, the first-generation women take on the task of instilling the cultural values of their homeland in subsequent generations. They want their children and even grandchildren to uphold the cultural values of their ancestral country. Chantal suffers doubly owing to her biracial identity. However, it is interesting to observe that while the pressure to hold on to ancestral culture continues for women of higher generations, no male characters in the novels, even those belonging to the first generation, are forced to adhere to their ethnic culture. Das appears to be acculturated as soon as he reaches the United States of America, and his level of acculturation is not determined by anybody else, while this is not the case with women migrants.

The novel *You Bring the Distant Near* demonstrates that female migrants of subsequent generations are also pressured to retain their ancestral culture. Helen Lee, in her “Second Generation Transnationalism”, states that one of the common methods adopted by the primary generation of migrants to inculcate cultural values of their motherland in their children and subsequent generations is introducing them to the art forms of their home nation (13). She says that it is observed among many immigrant rules that “particular forms of music, art, craft, or other elements of ‘culture’ help cultivate young people’s interest in their heritage and facilitate links to the homeland through shared interests” (13). Aparna Rayaprol, in her *Negotiating Identities*, observes a common trend among the Indian diasporic community, stating, “Indian classical dance is usually a girls’ activity, and it is also one of the ways in which the diasporic population constructs its identity as Hindu and Indian” (71). In the novel, the Das

family adopts this method. Das and Ranee ensure that their elder child, Tara, who is a great singer, attends Bengali music classes wherever they migrate. There would have been plenty of opportunities to develop her musical talent in Western music, which would have helped her gain better acceptance in the host society. At one point in the novel, Ranee challenges Lou's mother, saying, Tara can sing any American song after listening to it a few times (Perkins, *YBDN* 187). This makes it clear that Tara was also great at Western music. Moreover, she is not interested in learning Bengali music. Despite all these things, she was trained in Bengali music. This is because Das is very particular that his daughter, who is excellent at music, should be trained in Bengali music, which he considers a significant step in preserving the culture of their homeland. The family hopes that learning Tagore's music will help Tara develop emotional ties to her roots.

Anna, daughter of Tara and Amit, has spent many years in India, which makes her more Indian than her parents. Chantal, daughter of Sonia and Lou, is a bi-racial child and is not familiar with the ancestral culture of either of her parents. Chantal is not even good at Bengali. Still, she is trained in Kathak, an Indian dance form. Ranee, Chantal's grandmother, is proud of Chantal's talent in Kathak, which is very evident when she says, "You are the best dancer in that class, Shanti" (Perkins, *YBDN* 189). Rose, Chantal's paternal grandmother, would like Chantal to play the role of an African queen in a drama. Though Chantal is neither good nor interested in acting, she was excited to read the script that features an African queen who endeavours to save her tribe from slave traders (Perkins, *YBDN* 182). Chantal says,

only to make Grandma Rose happy, I auditioned for the part of the queen. I'm no actress, but I can tell Kareena's script is amazing. She's one of the best writers at Carver, and her queen's last speech got me choked up - *and* fired up.

Thanks to black pride on Dad's side of the family, it's easy to imagine a strong, passionate African woman as one of my ancestors. (Perkins, *YBDN* 182)

Since Chantal is a biracial child, her transnational attitudes are divided. Even so, her grandmothers compete with each other to instil transnational elements within her, and the mode they choose for this is through art forms. It is worth noting that Chantal is proud to see a strong African queen (Perkins, *YBDN* 182), which demonstrates her emotional ties to her father's country of origin; she is also happy about her talent in Kathak (188), which reveals her sentiments towards her mother's country of origin.

Objectification and Stalking of Adolescent Girls

Jaimee Swift and Hannah Gould in *Not an Object: On Sexualization and Exploitation of Women and Girls* observe that "Objectification and sexualization of girls in the media is linked to violence against women and girls worldwide".

Objectification is a serious issue faced by women and girls worldwide. As a consequence of the objectification of women by the media, its impact can be seen among laymen, too. Objectification faced by adolescent girls is a significant issue discussed by Perkins in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*.

The novel points out that right from their adolescence, women are being objectified. Tara, the eldest daughter of Das and Ranee, is so beautiful that the problems caused by Tara's admirers prompt her parents to restrict Tara from moving around alone. Once, when Das was in Malaysia for an official visit and his family was in London, a drunken neighbour banged on their door at midnight asking Tara to marry him (Perkins, *YBDN* 14). Das was upset to hear this, and he felt completely insecure in the foreign country because his family was left alone while he travelled abroad. If they had been in their homeland, they would have stayed with Das's parents, so Ranee and

the children would not be left alone. The family had to handle such issues on their own. The frequent official trips of Das aggravated such matters. This incident reveals that women are neither safe in the so-called liberated countries.

Das and Rane practice a strict upbringing of their children and rarely allow their children to go out unaccompanied. They are worried due to their gender and racial identities. Sonia jots down in her diary that in London, she was allowed to go alone only to the library and the park across the street. She also says that Tara was even more restricted from moving alone after the issue with the drunken neighbour. Women who migrate from countries like India dream of a liberated life in Western countries. However, female mobility is controlled in these liberal countries, too. While in India, women are restricted because of their gender, in the host land, pervasive sexism and racism severely hinder female mobility. The incident of Tara being troubled by their drunkard neighbour makes Das consider returning to India, though his family strongly objects to the idea (Perkins, *YBDN* 14).

What awaits the migrants in the newly occupied space is the multiple forms of marginalisation that grow out of the prejudice of the host society against their race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. The lives of women migrants in the US are also restricted. As Sonia says, “Ma won’t let me stay after school, even though several girls have invited me to join the Equal Rights Club. I thought life in America might be different. But no. I’m in captivity” (Perkins, *YBDN* 63). This is a major instance that demonstrates that female migrants, even of higher generations, do not enjoy absolute freedom in the US.

Sonia also suffers from unwanted attention from boys, so she becomes extremely conscious of choosing her costumes since she understands that it is not her

beauty that attracts them. Sonia is significantly burdened by the pressure to embody ideal beauty standards. This pressure can be attributed to the stereotypes created by the advertising and the cosmetic industry. Objectification of women is often overlooked as a silly matter. However, this is a serious issue that needs to be addressed, since it creates a ceiling that becomes an obstacle to women's advancement.

The people of her community are prejudiced against Sonia because of her dark skin tone. Even her mother is worried about, or rather displeased with, her skin colour. Ranees constant criticism of Sonia's natural skin tone is one of the reasons for the frequent fights between the mother and the daughter. Sonia's refusal to use "Light and Lovely" skin bleaching cream exacerbated the situation. Ranees is extremely anxious about Sonia's skin colour. Once, when Ranees and her daughters were about to disembark from the flight, Ranees wanted to ensure that her daughters looked good. As Sonia puts it, Ranees is satisfied with her elder daughter Tara's appearance but disappointed with Sonia's. Perkins demonstrates Ranees aversion to Sonia's skin tone thus:

She glances across at Starry, and then swivels to take stock of my appearance. I brace myself. Sure enough, that familiar twitch of displeasure passes across her face. It's gone in a moment, but after years of rejecting her Light & Lovely skin-bleaching cream, I know what makes her wince. The darkness of my skin.
(Perkins, *YBDN* 19)

Sonia wonders, "Which idiot in history decided that lighter pigment was more attractive than having more melanin?" (Perkins, *YBDN* 19). She asserts that whoever it is, the person has managed to infect the entire world with their notion of colour (19). She maintains that her skin is soft and smooth, and she has beautiful curly hair and

dimpled cheeks (19). She says that her mother is too preoccupied with skin pigmentation that she fails to notice her charm. She justifies herself, saying:

My skin is soft and smooth and the colour reminds me of rain-drenched earth. But it's as if the darkness of it keeps Ma from noticing my assets: curly hair, a round face that makes babies smile, deep dimples in both cheeks, big eyes that notice details other people miss. I like my face, even if Ma doesn't. (Perkins, *YBDN* 19-20)

Their distant relative and neighbour in the US is an intruder and an extremely judgmental woman. Sonia calls her "Big Harm" and her husband "Little Harm" (Perkins, *YBDN* 65). Sonia puts it thus:

I have labeled her "Big Harm" behind her back- short for the harmonium she plays- and her husband is "Little Harm", because he's shorter, skinnier, and slightly less evil than his wife. Even my sister's taken to calling them "Auntie Harm" and "Uncle Harm" in private. Starry manages to stick to "Auntie" when she addresses this terrible woman, but she's always worried that the Harm's going to slip out. It hasn't yet (Perkins, *YBDN* 65).

The lady who is too critical of other people comments on Sonia's skin tone, thus, "And her skin is so black! Americans probably don't even recognise her as a Bengali" (Perkins, *YBDN* 66). Without a moment's thought, Sonia replies "You mean they might think I'm black? That's wonderful! I'll fit right in" (Perkins, *YBDN* 66).

Thus, in the novel, the author focuses on how a dark-skinned South Asian girl is targeted by her co-ethnic peers. Such discrimination also occurs in India. Migration does not emancipate Indian women from Indian standards of beauty. Despite the space

they occupy, women are subjected to body shaming. As a result, she is doomed to be judged and criticised on account of her appearance.

People's praise for Tara's beauty also reflects the beauty standards that society upholds. While women are judged for their beauty, male characters never undergo similar situations. Though many diasporic writers have discussed racism faced by women and the pressure on women to preserve cultural practices in the diasporic space, the issue of "colorism" (Walker) faced by women and teenage girls from their community in the diasporic space is a rarely discussed area. Walker, in her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, coined the term "colorism" and defined it as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (332). Sonia faces colour discrimination from people in her own community. The Indian concept of beauty continues to influence them in the diasporic space as well. A girl is always supposed to be charming and beautiful. As Naomi Wolf notes in her seminal work *Beauty Myth*, the pressure on women to remain beautiful fosters disunity among women. Wolf says:

The contemporary backlash is so violent because the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable: It has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage. It is seeking right now to undo psychologically and covertly all the good things that feminism did for women materially and overtly. (10)

The emotional distress Sonia endures due to the constant criticism of her beauty is reflected in her friction with her mother. However, Sonia does not succumb to the

pressure to meet the set beauty standards. She resists the discrimination targeted against her. Through the character of Sonia, Perkins illustrates that the compulsion to meet the ideal standards of beauty is a major concern that adolescent girls face in diasporic spaces.

Financial Independence of Women in Diasporic Space

When Millett, in her *Sexual Politics*, asserts that “the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence” (40), she means that a woman’s power within a patriarchal system is directly related to her financial independence. Women becoming economically independent is a matter of anxiety for society. The society fears that once women become employed and start earning money, they will be independent and they might go astray. A woman who is not financially independent will remain submissive, as she has no other choice. The society is aware that once women become economically independent, they will emerge from their inferior status within and outside the family. In countries like India, there was a significant separation between men’s and women’s lives. Men used to be the sole breadwinners of the family, while women’s lives were confined to the four walls of their homes. The gender difference in economic independence is the main reason for masculine supremacy and feminine submissiveness.

Sandhya Rao Mehta, in her “Centring Gendered Narratives of the Indian Diaspora”, discusses the issues of H4 visas. These visas legally deny dependents, usually spouses, the right to work in the US (18). This reflects how women’s migration has been seen as a part of the movement of families. Thus, many migrant women remain as homemakers in the US. Women who were previously working in their homeland are forced to quit their jobs to join their husbands, often resulting in

unemployment (18). In the diasporic space, they are forced to depend on their husbands for their financial needs. Sometimes, even highly qualified women remain unemployed due to the restrictions imposed on them through visa requirements. Women who had been employed in their homeland are forced to remain homemakers in the country of settlement due to the visa restrictions, which means, in the diasporic space, they are deprived of the little freedom they had enjoyed earlier. This creates numerous emotional issues for them, which makes their survival in the newly occupied space more challenging.

Ranee, the first-generation migrant, always wants her elder daughter Tara to excel in her studies, just like Sonia. She always advises her to work hard and become a doctor or engineer (Perkins, *YBDN* 38). She is very particular that her daughters should be financially independent. Ranee's educational qualifications are not mentioned anywhere in the novel. She got married at the age of eighteen, and it could have been impossible for her to attend the college during that time. Her poor communication skills in English also suggest the same idea. When the Das family reached the US, Das bought a sewing machine for Ranee. When he suggests that the girls can wear clothes from London till their new American garments are ready, she readily responds that she will sew the American clothes quickly, as her children need them soon (Perkins, *YBDN* 26). Later, she tells her granddaughters that she has been missing sewing since her daughters started using readymade clothes after he got a promotion (Perkins, *YBDN* 234). Her outstanding aptitude for sewing is also evident when she helps her granddaughter Anna set up a dressing area at her school. Ranee could have pursued a career based on her skills, but did not. Her frustration, stemming from her lack of economic independence, is evident when she tells her daughters, "Don't make my mistake and give all the money-making power to your husband. Study hard and become

an engineer. Or a doctor” (Perkins, *YBDN* 38). Since Ranee is disappointed about her lack of economic independence, it can be interpreted that remaining a homemaker was not her choice. Migration does not make a woman economically self-reliant. A first-generation migrant woman is not always free to pursue a career of her choice. However, later generations of female migrants are portrayed as pursuing a career of their choice.

Gillian Creese and others in their “The Problem of ‘Human Capital’” demonstrate that males are considered the sole breadwinners of the migrant families (146-147). Therefore, only male migrants are considered productive, while the members of their families are regarded as unproductive. The notion that family members of independent immigrants are considered economically unproductive and a burden for the male member of the family is wrong. Women need to support their children who are new to a culture. Creese and colleagues observe that in addition to the emotional support they provide, women also willingly accept part-time work that falls short of their qualifications (153). A woman is considered a dependent migrant who follows her husband to the country of immigration. The role of women in migration is given too little credit. In contrast, the contributions of women migrants in the host country are profound and deserve recognition. To get better career opportunities, men need to reskill. Male family members are given priority for reskilling, even though women are equally qualified (Creese et al. 153). Women do not get any support from their husbands, as they are busy with reskilling and adjusting to the new work environment. Their parents and in-laws would have supported them if they had been in their homeland. Thus, in the country of settlement, women are sometimes compelled to manage domestic chores and raise their children on their own (151). Such responsibilities shouldered by women are rarely acknowledged.

Ranee's adaptation process is slower than that of her family members, a common issue among first-generation women migrants. However, the support she lends to her family members in their adaptation process is remarkable. Her enthusiasm for stitching American clothes for her daughters shows her role in helping them adapt to American culture. Another instance in which Ranee shows her competence is when she takes Tara and Sonia to school for admission. The school authorities were impressed by Sonia's skills in Mathematics, Science, and especially reading (Perkins *YBDN* 54). When they apologetically say, "Sonia will be a wonderful addition to our ninth grade. Unfortunately, we don't have room in our gifted track or we'd put her there" (Perkins, *YBDN* 57), Ranee strongly demands that her daughter be placed in the special program if she qualifies for the same. Though Tara was not admitted to the gifted track, Sonia was admitted to the gifted class in ninth grade. It was Ranee's unwavering attitude that helped Sonia get entry to the gifted program. These efforts of Ranee cannot be overlooked.

Generational Differences in Achieving Assimilation

The female characters Ranee, Tara, and Sonia reveal "dissonant acculturation" (Portes and Rubén 53). Ranee sticks to her ancestral culture for quite a long period after settling in the US. However, Tara and Sonia catch up with the hegemonic culture soon after migration. Thus, the 1.5-generation women migrants are more acculturated than Ranee, the first-generation migrant. Ranee is conventional in many ways, especially when it comes to the upbringing of Tara and Sonia. However, when Das passed away, Ranee could take the bold decision of not to return to India (Perkins, *YBDN* 113) as her daughters were bold enough to perform the final rituals for their father. In India, the final rituals are typically performed by one's eldest son. If one does not have a son, the final rituals will be performed by the eldest nephew or a close male

family member. One of their family friends took the initiative to do all the rituals for Das. However, the priest, who, in Sonia's words, is a "young, hip version of a purohit" (Perkins, *YBDN* 110), suggests that his daughters may perform the final rituals, since the deceased has no son. Sonia strongly agrees with Purohit, and she performs the final rituals, asking Tara to empty the urn in the Ganges. Sonia even shaved her head; a custom observed in her ancestral culture. However, this is usually done by sons or other male family members who perform the rituals. Sonia is strongly bonded with her father that she wants to do the final rites for her father by herself. By Sonia, the younger daughter, performing the rituals, they also deviated from the norm of the eldest child doing the final rites for the deceased. The conversation between Sonia and Tara goes thus:

"Baba doesn't need a son. He has us, doesn't he?"...

"You're right. He does. And he always will. I'm [Tara], the oldest Sunny. I'll do it."

"No chance," I [Sonia] said... "It was my idea. Besides, the same people who made up the son rule probably made up the oldest child rule. Let's break both at the same time". (Perkins, *YBDN* 111-112)

Inspired by her adolescent daughters who stood up for their rights, Raneer announced her decision firmly: "My daughters and I will be staying in America... In the house that their father bought" (Perkins, *YBDN* 113). The realisation that they are marginalised on account of gender, even in the country of settlement, encourages them to assert their rights. People gathered for the Das's final rites disapproved of the initiative taken by the Das children². However, the Das children resist the patriarchal conventions of male members of the family doing the final rites for the deceased. It is

the high adaptation level of her adolescent daughters that made Ranee confident enough to take such a bold decision during such a period when the family was going through emotional turmoil.

The ghetto mentality of the first-generation migrants usually holds them back from complete adaptation. They often have a strong aversion to the culture they have newly encountered. They demonstrate a lower tolerance for change than subsequent generations. It is commonly observed that first-generation migrants prefer to settle in areas where many people of their own ethnic community have been settled. Complete assimilation into the host society is sometimes impossible for first-generation immigrants, which can be caused by either “external factors” (Hussain 20), such as the racial biases of the hegemonic community, or “internal factors” (20), like the emotional connection migrants maintain with their ancestral culture. Their familiarity and ease with their homeland's socio-cultural codes also make their assimilation into the new culture difficult (Lahiri 58).

On the other hand, the next generations do not exhibit such an attitude. As a result, they gain a deeper understanding of the host culture and can adapt to it more easily. The 1.5 generation and successive generations of migrants, who are being raised and educated in the host nation, are familiar with the host culture. Absolute dismissal of the culture of the ancestral country is uncommon among the one-and-a-half generation and second generation (Hussain 26). Usually, these generations accept their ethnicity and ancestral culture to some extent (26). The 1.5 generation neither has die-hard compliance with their ancestral culture. They prefer to remain “hybrid” (Bhabha). Lahiri, in his work *Diaspora Theory and Transnationalism*, cites Bhabha's definition of hybridity “as a liminal, interstitial space, where traces of both the originary culture and

the culture of adaptation are found” (Lahiri 161). However, there are individual differences. This is evident in the characters of Sonia and Tara in the novel.

Sonia does not project many cultural values of her ancestral country, whereas her elder sister does. This is probably because their parents were very particular in instilling Bengali culture in her, by getting her trained in Bengali music, while they adopt a different approach to Sonia. Thus, the upbringing style is a factor that influences the inclination towards ancestral culture among the generations starting from the 1.5 generation.

Family is the primary, and sometimes even the only, factor that connects subsequent generations to their ethnic identity. They can easily accept the host culture, the culture they are exposed to, and are more familiar with. As children, they may be least bothered about their ethnicity and identity. However, as they take the initial steps into their teenage years, the question of ethnicity begins to haunt them. One should be able to come to terms with one’s hybridity. Unless they resolve this issue, they will undergo emotional stress. Perkins, having had multiple migratory experiences herself, can easily portray such inner struggles through her fictional characters.

It is common for the 1.5 and second generations to undergo an identity crisis, a struggle that is not typically encountered by the first generation. This is because first-generation migrants are aware of their ethnic culture and identity. Even though they adopt the cultural values of the host society to a certain extent, allowing them to survive in the new environment, they remain true to their ethnic heritage. First-generation migrants are characterised by their deep love for their motherland. They leave their home nation because they are compelled to migrate for several reasons. Even those who migrate for better employment opportunities, categorised as voluntary migrants, are, in

a way, involuntary migrants (Koser 18), as they migrate due to a lack of career opportunities in their home nation, and are thus compelled to. They are well aware of their ancestral culture and their ethnic identity. So, the first-generation migrants are not in a dilemma when they are asked about their ethnic identity. Even after they undergo the adaptation process, they are not confused when asked about their place of origin. This is because they have spent their childhood in their native land and are familiar with its culture. They have extended family members in the home nation, with whom they share bonds. They all have many nostalgic memories about their place of birth. Their familiarity with their ancestral culture prevents them from experiencing an identity crisis.

However, things are different for succeeding generations, as they are brought up in the host culture. Since they spend their childhood in the host land, they are not emotionally connected to their ancestral country. Thus, they can easily adapt to the culture of the country of settlement. Some of the children of the first generation are even born there. Some countries, like the US, grant citizenship at birth. Therefore, the host nation of the parents becomes the home nation for succeeding generations. They may not even be emotionally connected with their extended family members in their ancestral country. They might not have even visited their parents' birth country. Even if they have, it is like a tourist visiting a place. As a result, they have no nostalgic memories of their roots. Most of them are ignorant of the ancestral culture. At the same time, they are familiar with the culture of the country where their parents have settled. Their perspectives are shaped by the cultural values of the country where their parents have settled. Subsequent generations will tend to lean more towards the culture of the parental country of settlement (Lahiri 58). In fact, the host land of the first generation becomes the homeland of the subsequent generations.

Assessing someone's racial identity through their physical features is the wrong way of identifying one's race, but racists tend to judge people's race through their outward appearance. Higher generation migrants in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* are culturally indistinguishable from the hegemonic community of the host land; still, they are racially discriminated as their physical traits are different from the hegemonic community. The higher generations are also treated as 'others' just like their parents are treated by the white-dominated society, due to their skin colour and other physical traits. Their level of assimilation helps to gain a little more acceptance in society than their parents did. They might not have many cultural features of their ancestral country like their parents.

Das, the first-generation migrant character in the novel, had nostalgic memories of his ancestral land in Bangladesh, which he lost after India's partition. Ranee's dressing style could be considered a reflection of her love for her ancestral culture. However, her later transformation does not confirm the same. Moreover, Ranee also does not want to return to India because she dreads staying with her in-laws, who constantly criticize her for not being able to bear a son. Her fear of losing the meagre freedom she enjoys in the diasporic space forced her to extend her stay in the foreign land.

The first-generation migrants remain attached to their homeland for a long period. On the contrary, the 1.5-generation migrants become detached from their roots very soon. Tara and Sonia, the 1.5-generation migrants in the Das family, try to adapt to the dominant culture as soon as they occupy a new space. Ranee takes a long time to accept her transplantation completely. Ranee applied for citizenship many years after her children became American citizens. When Ranee accepts American citizenship, she wishes to become an American in every sense of the word. She even accepts

Christianity. All her actions reveal her troubles in dealing with her hyphenated identity. Till she acquired American citizenship, she could identify herself as an Indian. In her old age, she did not have relatives in India with whom she is very close, except for her daughter Tara and her family, who are temporarily settled there. Tara is not completely disconnected from their American ties. She will return to America, as evidenced by her decision to send her daughter to America for schooling. In these changed circumstances, Ranees feels that she should become a complete American. Ranees, who used to wear only Indian costumes, started embracing American fashion trends. She began to enjoy the American lifestyle in her later years. It takes her whole family's efforts to convince her that remaining a hybrid is fine. Anna explains how the entire family tried to convince Ranees, thus: "You were always good at bargaining, Ma," Aunt Sonia says. "Can you find some middle ground?" "We like you being American, Didu," says Shanti. "But we like you being Indian too"(Perkins, *YBDN* 290). Thus, analysing Ranees's efforts to assimilate, it can be inferred that the adaptation process of a migrant involves emotional conflicts and pressure, regardless of one's age.

When the Das family is on their way to the United States of America from the United Kingdom, Tara responds without a second thought that she is from London when a stewardess asks her where she is from. "Where are you from?" "London," Starry (Tara) responds, without hesitation. I am not sure I'd answer that question with just one word, like my sister. Where are we from? It's complicated" (Perkins, *YBDN* 12). Sonia, the younger daughter of the Das family, says she will not be able to answer the same question without giving it some thought. Sonia admits that the question is problematic because, as Tara explained to the stewardess, Tara was born in India and moved to London when she was nine. Moreover, they were then migrating to the US. Though their ancestral roots are in India, it seems that India is unexplored and alien to

them. On the other hand, Raneer was dressed in traditional Indian attire, which included a saree and a red mark on her forehead. This clearly shows how the first generation of migrant women clings to their ethnic culture. So, if the question had been asked to Raneer, she would have had a definite answer that she hails from India. However, it seems that her elder daughter, Tara, wished to avoid being identified by her ethnicity. Sonia is perplexed about her roots and identity. Thus, it is the succeeding generation of female migrants who are confused about their identity. Children brought up in their parents' country of settlement will have very few or no ethnic traits. They may not have an emotional connection with their ethnic cultural values. They neither wish to accept their ethnicity. However, complete neglect of one's ancestral culture is also absent among the 1.5 and second generations.

Tara is sometimes bewildered by Indian customs. Even the way her mother addresses her baffles her. Tara says, "Ma calls me 'Ma,' thanks to a weird Bengali tradition where an older person calls a younger person by the title the younger person is supposed to use for the older person-sort of an affectionate play on words, I guess" (Perkins, *YBDN* 39). For an Indian who is born and brought up in India, this kind of addressing is normal. Tara finds it strange because she is not exposed to Indian culture. The subsequent generations brought up in Western countries often find it difficult to accept the cultural norms of their ancestral country. However, she finally chooses to stay in India. Tara could settle in her ancestral country since her parents have always been keen to instil Indian culture.

Tara shifted from India at the age of nine. Tara never expresses her desire to become a Bengali. This is probably because she is already a Bengali at heart, which is why she ultimately chooses Amit as her better half and stays with him in India. Tara probably made such a decision because she has recognised that she is an Indian at the

bottom of her heart. She might have wanted to hide Indian traits within her and to present herself as an assimilated migrant, so that the hegemonic community would accept her, which is reflected in her arduous efforts to adapt to the culture of the host land.

As a teenager, Tara always strived to become an American girl who embodies current trends. She is a skilled actor who is also adept at imitating famous stars. Interestingly, she acts not only in plays but also in real life. She was very particular that she should be a typical American girl. Once Tara reaches the US, she immediately thinks about the transformation she needs to undergo in this new space, and she seeks a role model whom she can imitate, which can enable her to become a trendy American teenager. Her efforts to be transformed depict her intense desire to be accepted in the newly occupied space. She is not bothered about her ethnic culture; instead, she is worried about her transformation from a British girl to an American girl. As far as she is concerned, there is no question of Indian culture or ethnicity. Right from the moment she landed in New York, she was preoccupied with becoming a complete American. While in London, she imitated British supermodels Lulu, Diana, and Twiggy. The moment she landed in the US, she decided to be an American (Perkins, *YBDN* 37). She is aware that, as a Bengali, gaining acceptance in the white-dominant society is a Herculean task. The strategy she adopts is to imitate some popular television stars. It is more of a transformation into another person rather than mere imitation. Thus, in London, she initially transformed herself into Lulu, then Diana Rigg, and finally, as Twiggy (Perkins, *YBDN* 37). Tara says thus, “I perfected Lulu after watching the film *To Sir, with Love* five times, then briefly tried on Diana Rigg from a television show called *The Avengers*. Recently I mastered Twiggy the pop star, my best act yet. Sunny says that as Twiggy, I sparkle and conquer. My sister’s right. It moved me to center

stage” (Perkins, *YBDN* 37). Thus, she closely observes the mannerisms of popular stars so that she can culturally blend in with the host society. Her yearning to gain acceptance in the host society is revealed in her act of imitation. In fact, it is not mere acceptance that she longs for, but she wants to be the centre of attraction (Perkins, *YBDN* 37). Tara is very well aware that Diana, Lulu, or Twiggy will not work in America. Thus, when Tara accompanies Sonia to the library, she asks the librarian for the trendy television shows that depict the lives of young adults in America. As Tara herself puts it, watching television is a kind of research for her. She says, “She [Sonia] tells me I use the screen the way she uses reading and writing, but she’s wrong. For her, that’s escape. For me, it’s research” (Perkins, *YBDN* 36). Tara says she can be an American in a short span of three weeks (27). However, the moment she shares her desire to become an “American”, her father reminds her that she is a Bengali too. Das also explains that he has hired their neighbour to teach him harmonium lessons and Rabindra Sangeet. Tara’s parents, the first-generation migrants of the family, are anxious about their children’s lack of concern for their ethnic identity. The author portrays this conflict thus:

“I’ve [Das] hired our neighbor to keep up your harmonium lessons. And your Rabindra Sangeet.”

My sister [Tara] groans. “Do I have to, Baba?”

You’re a Bengali girl, aren’t you? Tagore songs are a must. I’m afraid you’re forgetting how to speak our beautiful language” (Perkins, *YBDN* 27).

Bengali music fills Das’ heart with love and reminds him of his first meeting with Ranee. Their first meeting was arranged by their parents at Ranee’s house, chaperoned by the elder members of both their families. They did not speak to each other. Ranee served him tea and sang a Tagore song, which made him fall in love with her. Thus, Das is trying to reminisce about the good old days in Bengal by training his

daughter in Bengali music. Though Tara is a good singer, she is not interested in learning Bengali music. This shows her lack of concern for her Indian identity. Tara exhibits many traits characteristic of a typical Indian woman.

Sonia is also affected by migration in many ways. Her love-hate relationship with her mother portrays the internal struggle she undergoes as she fails to accept her ethnic identity. She has no interest in returning to India. This is clear from the way she reacts when her father suggests returning to India. Sonia is absolutely against the idea of returning to India. She says, “Calcutta?! Where my grandmothers cried because I wasn’t a boy? (Perkins, *YBDN* 14). This explicitly shows her lack of attachment to her land of origin and the gender discrimination she faced from her grandparents.

So, we can infer from the characters portrayed in the novel that women migrants are determined to stay in the settlement country. When Sonia thinks about return migration, what comes to her mind is not nostalgic memories of her ancestral home, but the gender discrimination she will have to face there (Perkins, *YBDN* 14). Thus, even as an adolescent girl, she is aware of gender discrimination. Nostalgia and sentiments for the roots, which are considered key features of the diaspora, are not evident in the descendants of first-generation migrants.

Ethno-communal consciousness is not always found in later generations. Sonia even marries a person of a different race. The fictional characters of Perkins that belong to the one-and-a-half generation, and the subsequent generations, are not particular in having an ethnic communal relationship and are open to multicultural relationships. Many of them even choose to have their marital partners from outside their own race.

Chantal, Sonia’s daughter, undergoes emotional struggles in her teenage years due to her biracial identity. The identity crisis is common for every adolescent who

belongs to migrant families. However, as they grow up, they learn to accept racist comments and tackle such situations. An instance goes thus:

Dr Mitra makes small talk, asking after Mom and Aunt Tara and my grandmother. “You’ve got strong South Asian teeth,” she says, peering into my mouth. “Good thing you inherited them from your mother’s side.” “I [Chantal] let that go. I’m getting used to bizarre comments about my biracial heritage. Most people mean well”. (Perkins, *YBDN* 255)

Though initially, Chantal used to get irritated at such remarks and confused about her identity, which also caused emotional troubles, this instance reveals that she has begun to accept her hybrid identity. So, coming to terms with one’s identity is something that is attained gradually.

The first-generation women migrants are more forced to retain their ancestral culture than their succeeding generations. Though the subsequent generations also suffer from the pressure to remain true to their ethnic culture, the intensity is much less. The most challenging issue for the first generation is assimilation. For the first-generation women migrants, it is the pressure to assimilate on one hand and the pressure to retain their ancestral culture on the other hand. An identity crisis is a challenge common to all migrants, irrespective of their gender. What makes their migratory experience different is the problems they encounter in terms of their gender.

The 1.5 generation or second generation often visit their homeland to strengthen their bond with their country of origin. Sometimes, the visits also make them understand that they will never have a sense of belonging to their parental home country. From the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*, it is clear that 1.5 generations or second generations do not have an emotional attachment to their land of origin. They

also may not be emotionally attached to their extended family members. For many of them, ancestral land is a part of their vague memory or a place that they have not even visited. Tara makes her visit to her father's original homeland in Bangladesh. She visits Bangladesh to empty the ashes of her deceased father in to the Ganges river. Tara goes to Bangladesh because she shares a deep connection with her father, who had nostalgic memories of his birthplace when he was alive, not because she is emotionally connected to her father's homeland. She had never been there before, because the family of Das had settled in Bengal before he married Rane. Therefore, she has no emotional connection to Bangladesh. She does not visit her relatives in Bengal, which also clearly announces her lack of emotional attachment towards them. One and a half generations may have no sense of belonging in the parental country of settlement, as it is evident from Tara's attempts to adapt to the host culture; however, the problem is that they neither have a sense of belonging to their ancestral land. However, the 1.5 generation characters Tara and Sonia choose the host land over their ancestral land.

Gender Differences in Language Acquisition

Salman Rushdie, in his *Imaginary Homelands*, states the importance of fair skin and the use of English with its right accent, thus, "English has done all right by me; but I find it a little difficult to be properly grateful. I can't escape the view that my relatively easy ride is not the result of the dream-England's famous sense of tolerance and fair play, but of my social class, my freak fair skin and my 'English' English accent. Take away any of these, and the story would have been very different" (18). Rushdie affirms the importance of the acquisition of the English language in gaining acceptance in a white-dominant country.

The one-and-a-half generation and the second generation use English at school and parental languages at home in limited ways (Portes and Rubén 114). Their exposure in the host land makes the adolescent girls more comfortable in using English, though, at times, they use the mother tongue of their parents within the family circle (114). Their limited use of parental language becomes even less as they pass into adulthood (114). The subsequent generations are not even familiar with the mother tongue of the first generation, as they do not even hear the same at home (114).

A careful reading of the novel reveals that the language acquisition level of first-generation migrant women is far less than their male counterparts. Ranee shows no progress in her English accent, even in her advanced years. Das is shown as adopting American values, soon after migrating, which is reflected in his efforts to learn American English. He had been in America even before his family joined him. During his stay in America, he learned American English and its differences from British English. The reader understands this when he speaks to his family about the different ways in which the same thing is called in American English and British English. “You’ll be able to walk here from our flat, I mean apartment. And that lorry is a truck here. The suitcases are in the trunk, not the boot. You’ll have to learn how to speak American” (Perkins, *YBDN* 23). However, Ranee shows little progress in her English communication skills even after several years of life in the UK and the US. This demonstrates the limited exposure women migrants get in the diasporic space. The gender disparity in the adaptation process is highlighted by Perkins through the difference in language acquisition between the male migrant, represented by Das, and the female migrant, represented by Ranee.

Even after years of stay in the UK and later in the US, Ranee’s accent shows Indian traits. It seems she has not mastered the right use of language, even at her prime

age. This reveals the limited exposure she had in the host society. One such incident that portrays Rancee's poor English goes thus:

"I'm playing the prince". I tell Grandma Rose. "Apparently Uma looks more like a princess than I do."

"What's wrong with that teacher? Is she blind?"

"As a rat," Didu says.

As a bat, I think, but I don't correct her English. Didu hates that. (Perkins, *YBDN* 197)

The lack of English proficiency is regarded as an indicator of a low level of acculturation. Consequently, they gain less acceptance in the host society. Also, they become victims of racism and xenophobia more easily than others who have been adapted. Rancee represents many of the settler generation women who find it difficult to learn the correct accent of the language of the host land. This also suggests that the social circle of South Asian migrant women is limited to people of their community, as they do not go out for work and earn their livelihood. However, women migrants who belong to the one-and-a-half generation and the succeeding generations do not face this linguistic barrier.

Exogamy among Migrants

Exogamy or interracial marriage is considered an index of a high level of assimilation. The first-generation South Asian parents encourage their children to marry persons belonging to their ethnic community (Matusiewicz 79), which is due to their low adaptability level. Still, there are rare cases of interracial marriage among one and a half generations, which indicates that they have achieved a high level of acculturation.

In the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*, Ranee encourages Tara to marry Amit, an Indian, whom she initially refuses to. Her rejection of Amit shatters Ranee. However, later, Tara falls in love with him and marries him, which makes her mother happy.

Exogamy is common among higher generations because of their high level of assimilation. This can be examined in the light of Sonia's character, as she is less Indian than her sister Tara. From the beginning of the novel, she is portrayed as a person who is very open in matters like race. This can be considered a sign of her higher level of assimilation compared to her family members. Her liberal stance on race and ethnicity results in her interracial marriage. This again points out that it is not just the ordinal status of the migrants, but the adaptation level that influences migrants in choosing partners belonging to other nationalities or even races.

Ranee strongly opposed Sonia's relationship with Lou. She did her best to get Sonia back from the relationship, but all her attempts went in vain when Sonia eloped with her lover. Ranee, being a woman who adhered to Bengali culture, could not take it. Ranee refused to have any relationship with Sonia for a long period. When Sonia called Ranee after three years, the first thing she asked her daughter was whether she had broken up with Lou (Perkins, *YBDN* 173). Ranee's words reflect her strong aversion to Sonia's decision to marry a man outside their race. Thus, even in diasporic space, girls are restricted to exercise their choice. This is yet another instance in which Perkins demonstrates that women are not absolutely emancipated through migration.

Even after Ranee and Lou's mother, Rose, accepted their children's marriage with each other, mutual acceptance between the mothers took a longer time. When they started accepting each other, Ranee, the only member of the Das family who had not

assimilated into the host culture and also had not acquired American citizenship, also had gradually adopted the host culture. Only assimilated parents can accept their children's interracial marriages. Raneë, who had once opposed her daughter's interracial marriage, surprisingly spearheaded the effort to marry her granddaughter Anna to Darnell, whose ancestors were from Africa. The author describes Raneë's change in attitude, thus:

Years ago she might have been hesitant to open her door to him. After all, his ancestors are from Africa, like those of the son-in-law she used to resent so much. Now Sonia's husband, Lou, is like a son to Raneë. And this young black man has become a close friend. Almost family, which is good, since she's living alone now. (Perkins, *YBDN* 294)

This suggests Raneë has attained a high level of assimilation. Raneë, being a first-generation woman migrant, takes a longer time to adapt to the host culture.

Exogamy can, in turn, lead to divided transnationalism among the subsequent generations. While the descendants of migrants are caught between two cultures, the children of a couple who marry outside their race are caught between multiple cultures. Despite embracing American culture, Chantal is equally proud of her Indian and African lineages. As a girl, she is forced by her grandmothers on both sides to retain their respective ancestral cultures. Thus, a girl born to parents of different races suffers more because she is forced to represent the culture of both her parents. Again, this will not be a problem for male migrants since even the first-generation male migrants are free from such pressure.

Intergenerational Conflict and Gender

Despite their chronological status as migrants, women are expected to retain some aspects of their ethnic culture. In the novel, Tara is compelled by her family to learn Bengali music. Chantal, the second-generation migrant in the Das family, who is also a biracial child, takes Kathak lessons. To encourage transnationalism, retaining the ethnic culture of a family and passing it through generations seems to be the responsibility of women. Even the primary generation male members of the family are not being pressurised to remain ethnic. Despite the progress in the ordinal status of women migrants, they are forced to retain their ethnic culture.

When Raneer put restrictions on her daughters, Sonia, the younger one, appeared to be struggling emotionally, but constantly resisted the discrimination that was targeted against her. Sonia yearns for a space where she can enjoy her privacy. Her intense desire for private space is something that can be observed in all adolescents, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or upbringing. Children in Western countries enjoy more freedom and privacy. Sonia, who is more exposed to such liberal culture and least exposed to Indian culture, could not accept her parents' Indian style of parenting.

The uneasy relationship between parents and children is a major issue that migrants encounter in diasporic spaces. This is caused by the differences in their perspectives concerning cultural values. This cross-generational disagreement is a complex issue faced by the migrants, and this can be seen more in the mother-daughter relationship, as mothers are forced to transmit the cultural values of their ancestral country to their daughters, while male migrants are free from this challenge. From the beginning of the novel, Sonia's relationship with her mother is strained, while she has a great relationship with her father. One major reason for this is the lifestyle Raneer led.

Sonia could not agree with Ranee's Indian ways, such as eating alone after all the family members have had theirs. Wherever the family moves, Das tries to adapt to the culture of the place of settlement, just like his daughters. Therefore, the pressure to retain and transmit their ancestral culture is solely the responsibility of Ranee, the first-generation woman migrant, which reveals a gender dynamic that burdens women migrants as custodians of ancestral culture.

Ranee strongly believes that adolescent girls should be embodiments of beauty. It is always a mother's duty to ensure that her teenage daughters look beautiful. This is evident when their neighbour, whom the Das children call "Big Harm", complains about Sonia's dark skin tone. She takes extra care in the case of Sonia to meet the ideal beauty standards, which causes friction in the mother-daughter relationship. The pressure Ranee thrust upon Sonia to meet the ideal beauty standards also causes friction in their relationship. Her mother's biased attitude against her skin tone makes their relationship problematic. Though this is not directly an aftermath of migration, this also adds to the cause of the friction in the mother-daughter relationship.

Sonia's choice of a better half, who has African ancestry, causes tension in the mother-daughter relationship. If they had returned to Bengal, both Tara and Sonia would have married within their community. Like all other matters, the Das children would not have had the freedom to choose their partner if they had been in India. Thus, Sonia's choice of Lou as her life partner is an aftermath of their migration. Ranee, who shows a very low level of adaptation in the initial phase of migration, could not accept her daughter's inter-racial marriage, which severely frayed the fabric of their relationship.

Migrant Women's Preference for the Host Land over Homeland

Gauri Bhattacharya, in her “The Indian Diaspora in Transnational Context: Social Relations and Cultural Identities of Immigrants to New York City”, states that the decision to migrate is influenced by “consideration for children’s educational and work opportunities, the extended family’s pride and a wish to provide better financial support for one’s relatives” (81). Carola Suarez-Orozco, Avary Carhill and Susan S. Chuang, also in their “Immigrant Children: Making a New Life”, assert the role of family in the decision to migrate when they say, “More often than not, family obligations and family ties are the very foundation of the arduous immigrant voyage” (8). Similarly, family is a significant factor that influences migrants' decisions to consider returning (Varrel 335). Very soon after they occupy the new space, migrants from South Asian countries understand that the American Dream, which had influenced their decision to move to America, could be realised only by their succeeding generations (Waters and Pineau 247). However, the migrants strive to survive there, considering the future of their children. Thus, family is an influential factor in considering whether to return to their homeland.

There are several instances of well-settled migrant families returning to their place of origin. Aurelie Varrel, in “Gender and Intergenerational Issues in the Circulation of Highly Skilled Migrants: The Case of Indian IT Professionals”, observes that family is a major factor that motivates migrants to return despite the career success they achieved in the country of immigration (339). According to Indian tradition, sons are expected to take care of their parents. So, if the migrant is the only son or the eldest son or if all the sons are abroad, they return out of their sense of duty (Varrel 340). Many migrants have nostalgic memories of their homeland, which also influences their decision to return. However, none of the women characters in the novel *You Bring the*

Distant Near choose to return to India, due to their better level of freedom in diasporic space, which they gain as a result of the constant resistance they make against the discrimination targeted against them. This doesn't mean they enjoy absolute freedom in Western countries, where they settle.

By the statement made by de Beauvoir, which was used at the beginning of this chapter, she meant that gender is socially constructed. Even the title of her seminal essay, *The Second Sex*, indicates the secondary status of women. The scope of her study is not South Asian women. In fact, she was speaking about white women who were marginalised owing to their gender. The idea that white women enjoyed gender equality was an imperialistic idea spread by the whites to conquer the Oriental countries. The irony is that while the colonialists used the liberation of women as a token for colonialist expansion, they resisted the idea of gender equality in their own countries (Puwar 24). The early history of Western literature shows female writers using male pseudonyms to enter into the male-dominant field (Lewis 60), which reflects the gender inequality which was prevalent in Western countries. Feminism as a movement originated in Western countries, and its prevalence even in the 21st century validates that gender inequality exists in the so-called liberal countries as well. So, in a country where host women are marginalised, immigrant women can never be liberated. The liberation of women is additionally curtailed by the cultural values of their ancestral land, which are more stringent. Women being treated as a "second sex" is a universal issue. Only its manifestation differs. Doreen Massey, in her *Space, Place and Gender*, reasserts the early feminist idea that gender norms vary in different regions. Massey argues that even though the 20th century witnessed enormous progress in many fields that significantly reduced regional isolation, regional differences in gender norms are still prevalent (201). When women in South Asian countries find themselves being

treated as the “second sex” in their homeland, women choose to migrate with the hope of better liberty, as in the case of Raneen.

The seminal work *A Room of One's Own* is a collection of thoughts that Virginia Woolf had when she was asked to deliver a talk on the topic “Women and Fiction” to a group of young women scholars. In this work, Woolf speaks about the marginalised position women occupy in various fields, including literature. Woolf reflects on the fact that women have been denied the kind of education that men receive, and she also points out the lack of financial agency of women. The main argument she puts forward is that a woman needs a room and enough money to be a writer (Woolf 7). Woolf says that, if a woman has to write something, she must have a room of her own (73). Moreover, a woman never has time that she can call her own. Women need time to develop their creative skills and also to spend some time by doing things which they enjoy doing. However, women rarely get time for themselves as they are expected to conform to the gender norms set by the patriarchal society. Meeting these standards necessitates imposing boundaries on their freedom to pursue their ambitions. They are too preoccupied with taking care of people around them that they often fail to take care of themselves.

Edward Soja, in his 1996 work titled *Thirdspace*, discusses space within a tripartite framework: firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace. Soja explains “Thirdspace” thus:

can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the “real” material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality. (6)

“Thirdspace” is the space where things continue to happen and thus is dynamic (Soja 6). In the case of South Asian women who migrate to the so-called liberal Western countries, they have a concept of the place where they are moving. There is a general understanding that people enjoy better liberty in Western countries. Women from South Asian countries hope for liberty in the newly occupied space. Thus, the physical place to which they move is the firstspace, the idea they have about the host land is the secondspace, and the experience they have in the country of settlement constitutes the thirdspace. Thus, in Ranees case, her experience (thirdspace) in the Western countries (firstspace) was different from the concept (secondspace) that she had before her migration.

Despite the challenges they face, none of the female migrants who belong to either first or 1.5 generations prefer to return to India. Despite the multiple marginalisations they face in the host land, they prefer to stay in the country of occupancy. The marginalised position of Ranees in India compelled her husband to migrate. Later, when Das suggests returning to India, she vehemently opposes the idea. Her hesitation to return to India is due to the inferior status she has at her husband’s home. Ranees does not want to be part of her husband’s family, where she is criticised for not bearing a son. Ranees is very adamant when she says, “I’m not moving in with your mother, ... I’ll be judged right and left. No privacy. No freedom” (Perkins, *YBDN* 14). Sonia shares Ranees stand since she also does not want to be with her grandparents, who constantly complain that she is a girl. Sonia jots down in her diary, “Moving back to India would be our doom- the two of us married off to 'suitable' Bengali boys and Ma stuck in a small flat with a mother-in-law she hates” (Perkins, *YBDN* 63). Though the women migrants suffer from racial and gender discrimination, in the diasporic space, they resist the discrimination targeted against them, which helps

them attain better liberty in the host land. The realisation that they would continue to be discriminated in terms of gender in diasporic space also makes them understand the importance of resisting the marginalisation. The camaraderie among the female members of the Das family compelled Das to choose to settle in the US.

Resistance by Female Characters

In the fictional world of Perkins, the South Asian women migrants use various tactics to overcome their inferior status. None of the characters succumbs entirely to the domination. They do their best to come out of the marginalised position. Like hooks suggests in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, they convert the “site of deprivation” into “space of resistance” (230). In the book, hooks says, the site of marginalisation “is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (230). The female characters in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* challenge their marginalised position with strong determination. The multiple forms of marginalisation that women undergo in the country of settlement urge women migrants to resist the marginalisation. Thus, the space they occupy becomes a space for resistance. Many of their attempts to resist are fruitful; however, all the women characters of Perkins are shown as continuing their struggle to achieve equality in terms of their gender and race. The struggle faced by South Asian female migrants to achieve greater freedom is the core of Perkins' novels. These strong-willed characters, who refuse to adhere to traditional gender norms, are motivating figures for real-world women migrants. The inner power that the South Asian women possess is manifested in the resistance they perform. Moreover, a sense of camaraderie can be observed among the women when they feel they might have to return to their homeland.

As hooks suggests, the site of marginalisation is where one can produce the counter-hegemonic discourse. She says thus:

It [site of deprivation] is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I identified as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse, one that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. (230)

Though she emphasises that counter hegemonic discourse should be found in one's way of life, she does not deny the "counter-hegemonic discourse" in words (230). In the case of Perkins, a South Asian woman migrant settled in the US, she is attempting to produce literature that highlights the experiences of South Asian women migrants in a predominantly white country. It is also to be noted that Perkins is a writer with first-hand diasporic experiences. Perkins also must have faced several challenges in the countries of occupancy. From her experiences, she must have understood the hegemonic discourses that portray South Asian women as a doubly weak category owing to their race and gender. This must have motivated her to be a part of counter-hegemonic discourse, through which she portrays unyielding South Asian women. Perkins must have felt that she should bring to light the fact that South Asian women cannot be defeated, no matter how marginalised they are in the diasporic space. Perkins portrays the inner strength of these female migrants that helps them move on, despite the challenges they face. Additionally, Perkins believed that such representation would serve as a motivator for many women migrants who are on the verge of collapse. Thus, it is the space which she occupies, where Perkins must have faced multiple forms of marginalisation, that influences her creativity.

In the novel, all three generations of the female members of the Das family are portrayed as struggling to gain acceptance and gender equality. It is Ranee who compels her husband to migrate with the expectation of enjoying greater freedom in a Western country. Throughout the novel, she fights back against the hurdles that come her way. In the country of settlement, she is forced to continue the gender norms that existed in their home country. Only at her prime age she could achieve better freedom. However, to accomplish this, she even had to change her religion and stopped her friendship with her Bengali friends.

Maria Nikolajeva, in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, states that “Even when a child is occasionally allowed to triumph, it occurs with at least one adult’s support” (203). However, Perkins subverts this idea by portraying bold adolescent girl characters. These girls, who are also marginalised due to their age, gender and many other factors, help themselves and others to move out of their marginalised status. The participation of Sonia and Tara in the last rites for their father is a major instance in which the characters convert the “site of deprivation” into a “space of resistance”. It is this boldness of the adolescent daughters that helps Ranee make a strong decision to continue to stay in the United States of America, in the home that Das had bought for them. Thus, it is her adolescent daughters who take initiative in resisting the discrimination targeted against them. Ranee, who struggled with her hyphenated identity in her prime age, could come to terms with the same, with the help of her adolescent granddaughters. Therefore, it is the teenage girl characters in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* who take the initiative to emancipate the female characters from their marginalised status. As Roberta Seelinger Trites in her work *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel* observes in the case of Mark Twain and Louis May Alcott, that they “relied on adolescents as metaphors for

reform; that is, for both of them, the young represented the capacity for change that is necessary for a culture itself to change” (xiv). Perkins seems to follow the footsteps of Twain and Alcott in making her adolescent characters initiators in reforming the long-established gender norms. These girls do not wait for any boy heroes to come for their rescue, which is the usual way discourses present gender roles. Perkins does not want to instil gender norms in her adolescent readers by including male characters who save female characters from their crisis. Perkins also suggests a “female migrant camaraderie”⁴ as a solution to the problems female migrants face in diasporic space.

Conclusion

The problems faced by female migrants of different generations are somewhat different. While the inability to assimilate is the major concern of first-generation women migrants, the identity crisis is the main issue encountered by the next generations. Adolescent girls are also forced to meet the beauty standards set by society, with the idea that women are supposed to be embodiments of beauty, and men chase women who personify the beauty ideals. Any woman who fails to meet the beauty standards is sidelined.

All the female migrants face the problem of gender discrimination. A comprehensive study of the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* also suggests that women migrants of the first, 1.5, and even second generations are compelled to follow the cultural practices of their country of origin. This causes extreme pressure for the one-and-a-half-generation and the second-generation women characters, as they are not exposed to their ancestral culture. They spend their childhood and adolescence in the country where they are settled. They suffer from a severe identity crisis in their adolescence, and it is due to their sheer determination that they can overcome it. The

most interesting difference noted during the investigation, in terms of gender, is that even the first-generation male migrants are not compelled to practice their ancestral culture, and hence, they can determine the degree of their adaptation.

As the adolescent girls have already started experiencing gender discrimination, they realise that very soon, they will be deprived of the slightly better freedom they enjoy, just like their mother or other adult women members of their family. This realization makes these adolescent girls raise their voices against the gender discrimination they witness and even experience within their families and outside. Rather than learning the gender norms fixed by society, and thereby waiting for some male heroes to rescue them from their marginalised status, they themselves find a way out.

Sonia and Tara stand together in their decision to perform the last rites for their father. Their strong decision gave Ranee enough courage to openly declare her intention to remain in America by refusing to return to India. Sonia constantly encourages her mother to come out of the sorrows caused by the untimely demise of Das. When Ranee decides to assimilate, her adolescent granddaughters help her to find a middle way. Thus, throughout the novel, different adolescent girl characters provide a helping hand to other female members to overcome their marginalised status by converting the “site of deprivation” into a “space of resistance”. Instead of being submissive to fate, they are determined to strive for their rights. The narrative neither portrays women’s lives in diasporic space as liberated nor as suffering. It is a reflection on how women migrants can challenge their disadvantaged position in the diasporic space. The book itself is Perkins’ way of resisting by producing counter-hegemonic discourse that portrays strong female characters. Through her novels, she conveys the idea that adolescent

girls, who are marginalised on various grounds, such as race, age, and gender, are capable of altering conventional societal norms.

Female migrants from India were being featured in both the novels analysed in the preceding and the present chapters. The next chapter is dedicated to the novel series *First Daughter*, in which the protagonist is a Pakistani adolescent girl who migrated to the US when she was adopted by a white family. The chapter will discuss the intersection of Islamophobia with gender and race, and the strategies adopted by Sameera, the protagonist, in navigating the same.

Chapter 4

Intersectional Marginalities: Girlhood in Diasporic Space

The scope of this chapter encompasses two novels in the *First Daughter* series: *Extreme American Makeover (EAM)* and *White House Rules (WHR)*. Both novels in the series address the challenges faced by South Asian Americans with emphasis on the Pakistan-born protagonist, Sameera, an adolescent girl. A careful examination of the narratives *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* and *You Bring the Distant Near* suggests that better employment opportunities, hope for better liberty, and the chance to move out of a joint family are contributing factors of migration. The driving forces behind the Pakistani migration are significantly different from those influencing Indian migration. The political turmoil within their boundaries of their national territory is a major factor contributing to the migration from Pakistan (Rahnema 23). However, Sameera, the Pakistani protagonist of the *First Daughter* series, migrated to America when a white couple adopted her at the age of three.

The novels analysed in this chapter differ from the author's other two books, which have been examined in the previous chapters of this study. The novels *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* and *You Bring the Distant Near* demonstrate the pressure placed upon Indian women migrants to represent their ethnic culture. In the *First Daughter* series, Perkins portrays the life of a Pakistani adolescent girl who strives to assert her Pakistani identity, despite having no pressure on her to retain her ethnic heritage. Theorists like Ayesha Jalal states that "the real strength of the Islamic social order lay in the continued stability of the family unit and more specifically in the social control of women" (Ahmad 6), thereby suggesting the pressure on Muslim women to represent their ancestral culture. Jalal's observation confirms that the pressure to

preserve culture is a common challenge faced by women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Since Pakistan is a Muslim country, this notion of Jalal applies to women migrants from Pakistan. Some theorists contradict this theory of cultural preservation. Naaz Rashid, in his “Everyone is a Feminist when it Comes to Muslim Women: Gender and Islamophobia”, says not every Muslim woman wears a veil out of compulsion, but they opt to wear a veil because they want to assert their identity. Sameera, the protagonist in the *First Daughter* series, wishes to explore her ethnic culture and assert her ethnic identity, even though there is no external force compelling her to preserve her ethnic background. Sameera is not forced to be a harbinger of her ethnic culture because her adoptive family does not practice Islam. She was brought up as a Christian by her adoptive parents, who follow Christianity. With the freedom her parents provided to choose her spiritual path, she intends to explore Islam and South Asian culture by befriending a group of South Asian college students. By depicting a female character who struggles to assert her ethnic identity solely out of her own choice, Perkins attempts to convey the challenges women face in asserting their right to live a life of their own. The series also gives a picture of Islamophobia, which is deep-rooted in America.

When the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, the first part of the novel series, begins, the campaigning for the American Presidential election has started, in which Sameera’s adoptive father, James Righton, is a candidate. Sameera’s gender, age, race, Pakistani roots, and her probable Muslim identity cause lots of trouble during the campaign. The rest of the novel illustrates the strategies she adopts to overcome her marginalised position, which ultimately helps Righton to win the election.

White House Rules, the second novel in the series, portrays Sameera’s life in the White House. The narrative demonstrates that her father’s success in the election does

not end her marginalised status. She continues to resist the discrimination targeted against her and other downgraded people.

As Deborah Lindsay Williams states in her book *The Necessity of Young Adult Fiction*, young adults do not possess any official powers, and they are marginalised on the grounds of gender, sexuality, nationality, religion, or class (4). Williams calls attention to the point in “Deathly Hallows”, where “Tales of Beedle the Bard”, a collection of “old kids’ stories” (15), enables Harry, Hermione, and Ron to crack the puzzle, which ultimately helps them defeat Voldemort. Williams argues that, in young adult literature, one can find solutions to numerous problems that exist in our society (15). Perkins portrays strong adolescent girl characters to provide role models for teenage girls who face similar marginalisation in their real lives. Non-white migrant children can find solutions to their problems in Perkins’s fiction.

Maria Nikolajeva, in her seminal work *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, observes a common trend in young adult fiction that “Even when a child is occasionally allowed to triumph, it occurs with at least one adult’s support” (203). However, Sameera does not take any help from adults; on the contrary, she extends her solidarity to other adolescents who are similarly marginalised. She also helps adult migrants in several situations where they face discrimination. Through the character of Sameera, Perkins educates her readers on how one can emerge from their downtrodden status despite one’s multiple marginalised identities.

The novels incorporate a variety of issues like interracial adoption, marginalisation in terms of race, gender and ethnic identity despite belonging to a higher social class, “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 139), Islamophobia, “Pakphobia” (Considine 24), and others. The possibility of her being a Muslim was high since the

orphanage from which she was adopted was located in an area that was characterized by a significant Muslim demographic. Though this does not establish her Muslim identity, she is considered a Muslim by Americans, as she was born in Pakistan. These factors pave the way for different forms of discrimination based on her race, country of origin, and religion.

The novels elucidate how Sameera navigates the numerous challenges she faces owing to her various marginalised identities. The narratives also portray the struggles of a few other characters who hail from different South Asian countries.

Sameera as an Adopted Child

Sameera falls under Karen Dubinsky's definition of a "hybrid baby" (61). Dubinsky uses the term "hybrid baby" to denote children of one race raised by parents of a different race (61). He justifies the use of the term by quoting Robert Young, "wherever it [hybridity] emerges, it suggests the impossibility of essentialism" (25). As a "hybrid baby", Sameera navigates through the challenges she faces owing to her gender, age, race, religion, and ethnicity. Her race and gender, combined with her potential Muslim identity, make her vulnerable in America.

Besides Dubinsky, many theorists have contributed to the discussions on interracial adoption. Anne Collinson, in her scholarly article "The Littlest Immigrants: Cross-Border Adoption in the Americas, Policy and Women's History", affirms that children who move to a different country through adoption are rarely classified as immigrants (137). Based on the criteria put forward by Petersen, Richard H. Weil argues in *International Adoptions: The Quiet Migration* that the migration of adopted children is a forced migration, as they have no control over their migration (277). In opposition to these theories, the present study classifies adopted children as social

migrants. They are leaving their birth country to move to another country. They are not different from the wives and children who migrate to join their husbands and fathers. Sameera migrated at the age of three to live with her adoptive parents. Migration is never a self-opted choice for any child. Therefore, children who migrate through adoption can also be categorised as social migrants.

Interracial Adoption and Xenophobia in the United States of America

Xenophobia is the “fear and contempt of strangers or foreigners or of anything designated as foreign, or a conviction that certain foreign individuals and cultures represent a threat to the authentic identity of one’s own nation-state and cannot integrate into the local society peacefully” (Kulik). In the *First Daughter* series, Perkins exposes the pervasive xenophobia widespread among Americans.

A photo of Righton smiling at Sameera was captioned, “Righton: Soft on Muslims?” (Perkins, *EAM* 106). Righton’s love for his child is represented as his love for Muslims, and this is not being taken positively by the media. Here, Perkins shows the role of media in othering the Muslims. This suggests that, although individual families are attempting to bring about change, the broader spectrum of society remains largely unresponsive to these positive actions. This incident also demonstrates that Americans are sceptical about a President who is a pro-Muslim, which indicates the deep-rooted Islamophobia in America.

In “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States”, Dorothy Roberts, a Black, adopted by a white parent, asserts that the “existence of intimate interracial relationships cannot negate or solve the pervasive and systemic racism that persists in the United States” (50). Sameera’s foster family holds deep affection and love for the child. However, that does not seem to have a positive influence on the racist

attitude of society, which is reflected in the racist behaviours revealed by the American public even after Righton's victory in the election.

Sameera endeavours to eradicate the deep-rooted racial prejudices in society and she achieves partial success in the process. Sameera reveals her true self through her blog, instead of remaining true to the persona the campaigning agency has created through the proxy blog. In order to win the election, the campaigning agency wanted to project her as a typical American teenager. She uses her blog to discuss a wide range of subjects, including the racial prejudices in America. If she had not interacted with the American public, her father would not have won the Presidential election. Despite all the efforts she puts in, she is subjected to racism, which endorses the way American society is structured against visible minorities. However, Sameera continues to resist the discrimination directed against herself and others.

Racism Faced by Sameera during the Election Campaign

At the airport, Sameera was surrounded by many journalists, one of whom was incredibly rude and insensitive to her when he asked, "Are you an American citizen, young lady?" (Perkins, *EAM* 22). He continued to bombard her with numerous taunting questions, such as, "Did you get your citizenship recently? Do you speak English fluently?" (Perkins, *EAM* 22). It should be remembered that these questions are too much for a teenage girl to handle.

As a candidate in the US presidential election, the media is aggressively tracking Righton for any content. The paparazzi try to provoke Mr and Mrs Righton by harassing their daughter, Sameera, with questions related to her adoption. For them, she is a bait to trap Righton. Thus, Perkins reveals the media's popularity-driven agenda and its insensitiveness towards human emotions. The media is said to be the voice of

the layman. In that sense, such questions represent the attitude of the laymen of the country as well. Throughout the campaign, Sameera becomes a victim of racism. The relentless media attacks trouble Sameera, and very often she struggles to answer questions properly, despite the extensive training she receives from Marcus Wilder, a “marketing-to-teens communication expert” (Perkins, *EAM* 38). Wilder had trained her on how to wave her hands the American way, which is different from her British style. He had also asked her to include many “uh-huh” while speaking and to say “I’ll have to talk that one over with my father” instead of saying no, to appear American (Perkins, *EAM* 43). Wilder had also instructed her to include phrases like “this rocks or totally” and to giggle as much as she can (Perkins, *EAM* 43). The motive behind this coaching is to present her as a typical American teenager. The author describes her nervousness while facing the media, thus:

“Where were you born, Miss Righton?”

“Pakistan.” Smile. Wave. Giggle-slash- manic -chuckle.

“Has it been easy being raised by white parents? Do you wish they looked more like you?”

“Uh-huh. I mean, no.” Giggle again.

“Do you feel uncomfortable being the only minority in the room, Miss Righton?”

Another reporter guffawed. “How about in the entire Republican Party?” He added.

“Er... I’ll have to talk that over with my father.”

Oh no! She'd completely stopped making sense. They were looking at her like she was nuts. (Perkins, *EAM* 101)

The compulsion on Sameera to behave like a trendy American girl makes her uncomfortable—the media questions her about her adoption without understanding that such things are very sensitive and personal. She has been with her adoptive parents since the age of three. She has been brought up in a white-dominant area and is thus familiar with the white culture. Her parents have always been in diplomatic posts. So, being in a crowded room or being in a place where the whites form the majority is not something new to her. Thus, it is not the outnumbering of whites that makes her nervous, but the racist comments and situations that make her anxious. Falling prey to racism repeatedly tormented her and questioned her integrity. Marcus and Tara had trained Sameera in how to face the media and present herself to the public. All their efforts went in vain as the frequent racist remarks thrown at her made her diffident, and Sameera had an apprehension that her father would lose the election.

As understood from a close analysis of Perkins' novels, children become more aware of racism targeted at them as they step into their adolescence. When Sameera asks Bobby, her boyfriend, about his experience of growing up in South Carolina, he says, "I was the only brown kid for miles around. It was great while I was little; everybody was friendly. But when I got older, I always felt either too visible or invisible" (Perkins, *EAM* 194). Similarly, Sameera must have started facing racism as she stepped into adolescence, and her father's participation in the election made her popular and more vulnerable.

Paul Connolly, in his study *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children*, notes that individuals from certain racial backgrounds are underrepresented in certain

high-status occupations. At the same time, they are very much visible in low-status, labour-intensive jobs (13). In the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, Sameera was mistaken for a waitress at a party. She was asked to bring a platter of shrimp by one of the guests (56). The incident is narrated thus:

A portly, cigar-smoking man turned to her. "Bring another platter of that shrimp by here, will you?" he asked. ...but why did this man want her to bring him food? Surely a server would pass by again soon. Then the truth dawned. This man thought she *was* one of the waitresses. Her dress did resemble the simple dark uniforms worn by the staff - the only other nonwhite people in the room. "I'm sorry," Sameera said. "But I'm not a waitress." (57)

She realises the racial disparity among the people present at the occasion. She also understands that all non-white people other than herself are waiters. The man feels sorry when he is told that she is the daughter of James and Elizabeth. He makes apologies, saying:

"I 'm sorry, Righton," the man managed to say. "I had no idea- I'm sorry." He turned to Sameera, his face as red as the dipping sauce for the shrimp. "How can I make it up to you, my dear?"

"It was a mistake," Sameera said. "Don't worry about it" (57).

Though Sameera tried to ease the situation, her parents were extremely annoyed at him for making a racist remark, even though he apologised. The incident serves as a stark revelation of the racism in America. All the guests, except Sameera, are white, while the waiters are of a different racial background. Thus, it is understood that non-whites rarely occupy influential positions. The man who mistook her for a waitress reflects the racial biases that are deeply ingrained in society. American society has internalised that

all people of colour occupy/ should occupy low-paid jobs. Thus, the author points out that people of colour do the so-called lower-strata jobs. While things like parties and clubs are meant for whites, the presence of non-whites can be seen only in the form of low-paid waiters and the like. This particular incident is also an example of “micro insult” (Torino 3-4). Through this incident, the author effectively portrays the social hierarchy that different racial groups occupy in America. The job hierarchy operates on an unwritten but commonly accepted code that whites occupy the high-paid jobs, whereas people of colour occupy low-paid and labour-intensive jobs.

Elizabeth, Sameera’s adoptive mother, says that they have faced two instances of racism in the first few hours of their being together, and she adds that she will not be able to handle any more in the future (Perkins, *EAM* 60). Elizabeth also says that their campaigning staff, Tara, thinks it will be more challenging as the election gets closer (60).

The campaigning agency was doubtful that Sameera’s racial identity would jeopardise her father’s chance of winning. The conversation between Sameera and Tara, the campaigning staff, goes thus:

“I’ve [Sameera] lived overseas a lot, but this doesn’t feel like a foreign country to me, if that’s what you’re worried about.” “I [Tara] am not worried about how America feels to you. You’ve got to realize that *you’re* going to seem foreign to America... You’re going to look like an outsider to some Americans- not to everybody, of course, but there are still some people like that out there.”
(Perkins, *EAM* 34)

Sameera was instructed to dress up like a typical American teenager, only because she was not an American. Tara compels Sameera to transform herself into a

trendy American girl, as it is very much required for her father's success in the election. Tara also says that Marcus is quite aware of pop culture, and he is the best one who can help her become a complete American girl (Perkins, *EAM* 41). If she had been an American, nobody would have pressured her to dress up like a typical American trendy girl. She would have had enough freedom to choose her level of being an "American". The campaigning staff make every effort to portray Sameera as a typical American girl to the public. They even created a blog that claims Sameera as its owner. However, the things spoken there very often do not align with her perspectives or true identity. The primary objective of creating the proxy blog is to establish a persona that portrays her as a stereotypical, trendy American teenager. Tara wants Sameera to review the blog the agency has created for her and update herself on what is going on there. Tara says, "Don't forget to read your blog; you don't want to say something that seems out of character" (Perkins, *EAM* 88).

Sometimes, duplicates are more perfect than the original, and the way the campaign team tries to mould Sameera affirms this particular aspect. The campaigning team wanted to present her as an individual who is well assimilated into American culture. Tara goes to the extent of asking Elizabeth to change Sameera's pet name, Sparrow, to Sammy. "Sparrow! What a sweet name. Don't you think 'Sammy' suits her better? It sounds a bit more...American, don't you think?" (Perkins, *EAM* 27). Thus, rather than presenting herself as what she really is, she is supposed to project herself as an idealised personality envisaged by the agency through their proxy blog. This is a consequence of the intersectional oppression she faces as a non-white woman. The agency is very particular about presenting her as a pretty American girl, since she belongs to a different racial background.

Through Sameera's voice, Perkins conveys how the race plays an important role in enabling a migrant to gain acceptance from the host community, in a white-dominant country. While answering the question, "How long does it take people to drop that ethnic adjective we put before the word "American?", a question she got from one of the Sparrowbloggers, Sameera explains the differences in the experiences of white migrants and non-white migrants in America, thus:

White kids get to do it after they lose their parents' accents, and they don't introduce themselves as Polish American or German American anymore. But Chinese, Japanese. Koreans. Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, South Asians – we stay Asian American or African American or Native American or Pakistani American (I'm not even sure if I should use hyphens or not) for several generations, until (or if) our descendants intermarry with white people and stop looking "ethnic". So, an African American person can have a granddaughter who is described as just plain American- if she's light-skinned enough and her blood's been mixed enough times with white people? (Perkins, *EAM* 242)

Sameera's answer to this question reflects the racism that exists in the United States of America. It can be inferred that skin pigmentation matters more than the assimilation level in gaining acceptance in any white-dominated country. One needs to be white-skinned to introduce oneself as an American.

Women as Embodiment of Beauty

Female characters in fairy tales, such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella," are rescued by Prince Charming, who falls in love with them because of their beauty and charm. These fairy tales that have left their impression on generations illustrate how a woman is often an object of the "male gaze" (Mulvey 837). From early

childhood, girls are taught that they must be good-looking, and they spend their entire lives nurturing their beauty rather than developing professional skills. A woman, right from her adolescence, is conditioned to believe that she can win a man's love only with her beauty, charm, and docile nature. She is not expected to be brave, courageous, or adventurous. Such qualities are considered masculine, and society does not encourage a woman to develop them.

Naomi Wolf, in her seminal work *Beauty Myth*, notes that, although the number of financially stable women has increased significantly, women have become increasingly preoccupied with their appearance (11). Wolf asserts that, in this aspect, contemporary women are worse off than previous generations. In the pursuit of attaining unrealistic beauty standards, many women have started suffering from eating disorders (10). Wolf observes that women go to the extent of undergoing cosmetic surgeries, which are mostly risky, to meet the beauty ideals set by society (10).

Wolf speaks at length about how women are expected to be beautiful and are made to believe that men desire to possess women who personify beauty (12). This sort of conditioning of women maintains their subordination. The beauty myth is a powerful tool in diminishing women's sense of self-worth and controlling their progress. Wolf notes the devastating effects of the beauty ideals, thus:

the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable: It has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage. It is seeking right now to undo

psychologically and covertly all the good things that feminism did for women materially and overtly. (10-11)

In tune with this myth, “beauty” is something that exists universally. In reality, beauty ideals change over places and time (Wolf 12). Women are made to believe that they must be the epitome of beauty. Beauty concepts are social constructs shaped by numerous political and cultural factors (12), which are not universal and vary from place to place. She says, “Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West, it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact” (12).

Wolf asserts that no historical or biological reasons support the beauty myth (13). The beauty standards reflect the kind of behaviour that men want women to possess (13-14). These standards are created and maintained by patriarchal institutions to conserve the gender hierarchy that has been practised for ages. Thus, she argues that “the beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” (13).

The beauty myth sparks a high level of competition among women; consequently, they remain disunited, which also holds them back from progress (Wolf 14). Many women with high potential are overly concerned with their appearance. As a result, their growth is hindered (10-11). Obsession with beauty standards is more harmful than any other ideal of femininity since this can divert women from achieving greater heights and thus preventing them from gaining equality with men.

Women have been rejecting the traditional gender roles that restrict their advancement (19). However, the theorist maintains that the standards of beauty are so ingrained that it is difficult for women to overcome their influences. She suggests that

women's perspectives of beauty should be reformed (19). This is what Perkins is trying to convey through the character of Sameera.

In the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, the author portrays the election-campaigning agency's efforts in transforming Sameera into a typical American teenager. They also insist that Sameera should be able to spellbind the youngsters. It appears that the campaigning agency wants her to utilise her good looks and alluring mannerisms to secure the votes of young men. This is a clear example of the objectification of women. A conversation between Sameera and Tara goes as follows:

“Your skin color's beautiful, don't get me wrong, but it's going to make you disappear in front of the cameras.

“I usually don't wear much makeup,” Sameera said. Just a touch of lipstick.”

“That's going to change,” Tara said grimly. “You've got to accept *some* things without debate. When you get in front of cameras, you wear makeup” (Perkins, *EAM* 44).

This demonstrates how women are dehumanized and treated as mere objects to satisfy the “male gaze”. They expect Sameera's good looks would help Righton win the election. These efforts taken by the campaign team put pressure on her in two ways: by objectifying her as she is a woman, and also by repeatedly reminding her that she belongs to a different race through their efforts to portray her as an assimilated girl. They are very eager to cover up her racial identity since they find it a drawback, which may stand against her father's chances of winning the Presidential election.

The campaigning agency's strategy was to make Sameera look attractive and appealing to the public. Public-pleasing extends to the point where campaigning strategists even force her to expose her cleavage while dressing. “A hint of cleavage is

perfectly modest for a teen girl, especially by L.A. standards”, Tara says (Perkins, *EAM* 74). This reveals the high degree of objectification of women in the US. Sameera also undergoes racial discrimination due to her Pakistani origin. Thus, being a non-white woman, she is constantly reminded of how she differs from the hegemonic community and is advised to undergo a makeover. The continuous exposure to racial comments made Sameera conscious of her skin tone. “The first thing that struck her was how dark she looked in the photos. She’d loved the feel of the pristine white silk dress Vanessa had chosen, but in the newspapers and magazines, the color made Sameera look like a black-and-white graphic imported into a full-color spread” (Perkins, *EAM* 105).

Immediately after the makeover, Sameera feels that she is finally visible. Being a brown-skinned girl, she had never been the centre of attraction in the white-dominant spaces where she lived. Initially, she was happy to receive attention from many people. She found herself being noticed by others (Perkins, *EAM* 78). Her transformation through the makeover was so impressive that many youngsters gathered to catch an early glimpse of Sameera (Perkins, *EAM* 78). This is exactly what the election campaign staff wanted, and it is one of the strategies of gathering votes in favour of them. The young construction workers who assembled there to have a look at the new version of Sameera made sexy comments about her. This puts down her momentary excitement. She wonders, “Is this all it takes to get some male attention? It’s like putting a slab of steak in front of hungry dogs” (Perkins, *EAM* 78).

The author demonstrates how a woman is expected to dress herself in a way that attracts male attention. A woman or a girl living in America, a highly developed country, is also not free from being objectified. Being a non-white girl, Sameera is constantly reminded of her dark skin tone and is advised to undergo a makeover. She also suffers from racial prejudices in the white-dominant country. The kind of

objectification she undergoes is due to her brown skin. Being a migrant, she was also expected to convince the American public that she had been assimilated. If she had been a boy, the looks would not have been a concern. If Sameera were white, she would not have had to convince American society that she is culturally an American. The intersection of race and gender causes these kinds of troubles for her. The experiences of Sameera can be described as a perfect example of “intersectionality”.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, who advanced the theory of “intersectionality” (139) in her “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-Racist Politics,” argues that “intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (140). The “intersectionality” can be defined as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings” (Delgado and Stefancic 58). It means that when an individual falls into more than one of these marginalised categories, that person is oppressed in more than one way. In *Twenty-First-Century Feminisms in Children’s and Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites observes about intersectionality in children’s and adolescent literature, thus:

The ideas behind intersectionality are particularly useful in children’s and adolescent literature because all childhood experience is always already intersectional, based as the genre is on the relative social powerlessness of people who are not adults. That is, childhood and adolescence are one aspect of identity politics that involves subjects who have less political and economic power than the adults who define laws and social norms. (31-32)

Trites asserts that age is a factor that makes children and adolescents vulnerable to discrimination. Sameera's vulnerability can be attributed to her age, also. The term “intersectionality” (Crenshaw) was coined and developed to address the concerns of black women who are discriminated on the grounds of their multiple marginalised identities. The idea can also be used to explore and reveal the challenges faced by South Asian women who migrate to white-dominant societies. For non-academic people with little exposure to oppressive acts of racism, it is something that is endured by Blacks only. As migrants, brown-skinned people realise that racism poses an issue for them as well.

Thus, even in the so-called liberal nation, society assigns women the role of a seductress. Although Sameera is initially delighted to be in the limelight after her makeover, she soon realises that she is being objectified. When the reality hits her, she decides to deviate from the set standards of beauty. Her communication skills, combined with her intelligence, help her father win the election. In both novels in the *First Daughter* series, she continues to fight against the benchmark of beauty with her intellect. The author challenges conventional stereotypes of women and proves that women can be successful in the world with their intellect, even without being charming.

Women and Islamophobia

Islamophobia can be defined as “anti-Muslim racism” (Elahi and Khan 7). Claire Alexander, in his “Raceing Islamophobia”, borrows the definition of Islamophobia from the original 1997 Runnymede report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, which defines Islamophobia as, “unfounded hostility towards Islam...It also refers to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from

mainstream political and social affairs” (13). David Feldman, in his “Islamophobia and Antisemitism”, points out that in the case of Muslims, their religious identity sums up their definition by overlooking other aspects of their identity (78). Ghaffar Kucher, in her *The Religification of Pakistani-American Youth*, also expresses a similar viewpoint when she says that though race is a matter of concern, religion is a matter of greater concern in the case of Pakistani American Youth, which Kucher refers to as “religification” (31). Kucher, in her study, suggests that “it is ultimately religion that is used to define Pakistani American Youth and serves to mark them as noncitizens” (32).

Marta Bolognani and Stephen M. Lyon in *Pakistan and its Diaspora: Multidisciplinary Approaches* state that “around 75% of Pakistanis in America have U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status” (243). However, this does not free them from being racialised. Tamera Lee Stover, in his “Hijacked Identities: Silicon Valley Pakistanis and Tactics of Belonging”, says that in the immediate post 9/11 period, a significant number of migrants were detained on suspicion of having terrorist links (4). He also states that, as per the records of the Office of the Inspector General, although all the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, Pakistanis were the largest number of those detained, equaling about 33 percent of detainees, or more than double the number of those from any other country” (4). This biased thought about Pakistanis is demonstrated in the instance in the novel *White House Rules*, when the Righton family was verbally attacked by the mob that surrounded them. While returning after church service, the Righton family was surrounded by a crowd, which initially, Sameera found friendly. However, soon she heard a loud voice, “Hey, Paki! Go back to Pakistan!” (Perkins, *WHR* 68). The comment can be interpreted from the perspective of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and “Pakphobia” (Considine 24). The crowd continued to hurl insults at Righton, calling him “A Muslim Lover” (Perkins, *WHR* 68) without understanding that

he stands for the human cause rather than for any particular community. This shows that a part of the American public feels insecure about Righton's lenient attitude towards Muslims.

Sunil Bhatia, in his "9/11 and the Indian diaspora", speaks of the problems encountered by anyone who resembled Muslims in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. The situation in the United States in the immediate post-9/11 period was threatening for anybody who looked racially different (28-30). South Asian American citizens, irrespective of their religion and the fact that many of them were born and brought up in America, began to be considered as outsiders, attributing racial similarity with Muslims (28-30). Any foreign-looking person was treated with hostility (28-30). Moreover, all Muslims were treated as if they were all part of a terrorist network, irrespective of their citizenship status (28-30). Sunaina Maira, in his "Youth Culture, Citizenship and Globalization", also delineates the prejudices and hardships faced by South Asian Muslims in the US in the post 9/11 period. Maira asserts that after the September 11 attacks, racialization took new forms as far as South Asian immigrant youth are concerned. Maira states that many individuals who "appeared Muslim" became victims of racism and physical assaults after the terrorist attack (219). Maira adds that this form of racism was not new to Arab Americans; however, for South Asian Americans, there was a significant change in their racial experience as they suddenly became the focus of intense scrutiny and constant surveillance (219). This makes it clear that Islamophobia existed even before September 11, 2001, but intensified in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. Before the 9/11 incident, South Asian Muslims who were brought up in America were either acculturated or assimilated into American society. They had gained acceptance from American society, at least to a small extent. Most of the higher generations of migrants who were born and raised in the United States, had an

emotional attachment to the country of their birth. However, things changed after the 9/11 event. Regardless of how long they have been American citizens, they have begun to face mistreatment more than ever before.

Joanna Herbert and Richard Rodger, in their academic paper “Narratives of South Asian Muslim Women in Leicester 1964-2004,” which draws on insights gathered from interviews with Muslim women settled in Leicester, contest the established idea that “Muslims are self-segregating” (54). The interviewees share that they choose to keep themselves away from the rest of society because they experience Islamophobia, not because they want to. However, the younger generation Muslim women characters in the novels in the *First Daughter* series never isolate themselves, even though they frequently become victims of Islamophobia. Muslim women are more vulnerable as their ethnic identity is reflected in their attire.

Islamophobia is a significant concern discussed in the *First Daughter* novel series. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, observe how things have become more complicated for Muslims since the 9/11 incident. Afterwards, Muslims began to be treated more badly than ever before. They are always under surveillance and are often subjected to verbal and physical abuse (115).

Sameera has no connections with Pakistan and is not a threat to anyone. Moreover, she was brought up by a white couple who practice Christianity. Still, she is being considered an enemy. Throughout the campaigning period and thereafter, the media and the public targeted Sameera with racist comments. Nobody would have been biased against her if she had been white. A segment of American society is upset with her race, country of origin, and the religious community she probably belongs to.

Sameera's smartness, wisdom, and communication skills that were showcased in her blog successfully convinced the racially biased Americans that racism is pointless; at least a majority of Americans were convinced, and her father could win the election. Even after her father emerged victorious in the election, she continues to interact with the public through her blog. Her blog plays a significant role in her gaining acceptance from the host society. Once, when her mother asks Sameera, "Are people leaving mean comments on your blog?" (Perkins, *WHR*, 56), she responds thus:

"Actually, it's working the other way. Sparrowbloggers are getting to know each other and sending notes to other Sparrowbloggers instead of just to me. Any newbie who sounds the least bit mean is straightened out pretty quickly by the regulars. It's getting to be a safe place, but people still have the freedom to say what they think, which I like". (Perkins, *WHR* 57)

The American public is upset because they fear that Righton will be lenient towards Muslims if he is elected as the American President. In the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, the novelist illustrates how American society equates Righton's fatherly love for Sameera with his affection for Muslims. After the dance party in which Righton dances with Sameera, their photo was printed in the newspaper with the caption: "Righton: Soft on Muslims?" (Perkins, *EAM* 106), as if he had done something offensive that voters need to consider before marking their votes. The newspaper report reads thus: "As he clutched his Pakistani daughter in his arms, observers wondered if James Righton's foreigner-friendly approach during these frightening times might not be tough enough to fight the war on terror" (Perkins, *EAM* 106-107). Thus, the media twisted Righton's love for his daughter as his love for Muslims. Righton suffered a few setbacks in the initial days of the campaigning period because the American public was biased against his adopted daughter's roots. The author exposes how intensely the

Americans want a President who will be tough with Muslims. They have a false concept that America will be more secure under a President who is strict with Muslims and Muslim immigration. The author thus brings to light that Islamophobia and xenophobia are firmly interwoven in the fabric of American society.

In the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, Mariam's grandmother and Sameera become victims of Islamophobia at a grocery store. Once during her secret journey to meet her friends at SARSA, Sameera witnesses Mariam's grandmother being threatened by the security staff in a grocery store (Perkins, *EAM* 217). The woman was caught by the guard for taking a gallon of milk without paying for it (218). Sameera speaks for the old lady thus:

"She didn't HAVE to pay for the milk," ... "Your store is offering a free gallon of milk to anybody who completes this puzzle. Don't you know your own promotions?" ... "She's an *old* woman. You didn't have to grab her like that. You scared her half to death."

"Okay, okay. Take the milk." He handed the gallon to Sameera and turned away, but not before she heard him mutter an obscenity and say, "Stupid foreigners." (Perkins, *EAM* 219)

The old lady was unable to convey this to the grocery store staff due to her poor communication skills, so Sameera conveyed the message to the guards. The guard's despicable behaviour towards Sameera and Mariam's grandmother serves as a poignant illustration of xenophobia and Islamophobia that exists in America. Sameera handles the situation boldly. "We are not leaving until we get an apology, ... May I see a manager, please?" (219). This incident is an illustration of "micro assault" (Sue 28), a kind of "microaggression" (Pierce 66). "Micro assault" is "related to overt racism,

sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and religious discrimination in which individuals deliberately convey derogatory messages to target groups” (Torino,4). Here, the security staff deliberately insults Sameera and the old woman. So, this is an instance of “micro assault”.

Muslims have been troubled on account of their religion in the United States, especially after the 9/11 incident. This has become particularly more difficult for Muslim women in diasporic spaces who choose to identify publicly with their religion by wearing a hijab or scarf. Haleh Afshar and others in their paper “Islamophobia and Women of Pakistani Descent in Bradford: The Crisis of Ascribed and Adopted Identities”, observe that women who wish to identify publicly with faith and wear hijab suffer more due to Islamophobia and the anti-Muslim sentiments (167). In many cases, women are forced by their families and the people of their community to wear the hijab. It is instilled in the minds of women that they must pass on their ethnic culture to subsequent generations. A woman who wears a Burqa or veil is easily identified as a Muslim. Thus, Muslim women are more vulnerable than men. Men are not forced to retain their ethnic or even religious identity. Western nations want migrants to be integrated into Western culture, and they do not support the idea of Muslim women wearing the hijab or scarf. According to George W. Bush, “You are either with us or with the terrorists” (Afshar 168). Thus, Muslim migrants sticking to religious principles without getting integrated are tagged as terrorists. Therefore, the pressure on women to stick to their ancestral culture and the simultaneous pressure they face from the mainstream community in the name of religion make the lives of women more miserable in diasporic space.

Naaz Rashid, in his “Everyone is a Feminist when it Comes to Muslim Women: Gender and Islamophobia”, asserts that the veil is considered oppressive because it is

assumed that Muslim women are forced to wear it by Muslim men. Rashid states that though there are such instances when Muslim women are forced to wear a veil, many Muslim women choose to wear one to assert their religious identity (61). Rashid argues that Muslim women in diasporic space are often forced to remove veils out of fear of becoming victims of Islamophobia (61). Muslim women who opt for a veil need not come from families with fundamentalist thoughts. These families are also not particular that the young women of their families should wear the *Purdah* or veil. Still, many Muslim women choose to wear their ethnic attire because they prefer to live up to the ideals of their ancestral culture. Moreover, they consider the practice to be liberating rather than constraining (Afshar 175). According to these Muslim women, real freedom is not in wearing Western costumes, but in being able to wear a dress according to one's choice. They prefer traditional ethnic attire to Western-style costumes. However, women are denied this privilege. Thus, women do not enjoy complete freedom in Western countries as well. Wearing jeans or modern clothing does not guarantee liberty. If women migrants are restricted from wearing hijabs despite their preference to wear one, it cannot be considered liberty. The state's interference with such things is a violation of one's basic rights.

Sameera is a representative of those migrants who wish to assert their ethnic identity. Her foster parents are Christians, and they never compel her in matters related to religion. They have given her absolute freedom in these sorts of things. She often chooses to wear a burka and enjoys the company of South Asian students. This demonstrates her curiosity to understand her ancestral culture more deeply and her eagerness to assert her right to practice cultural values according to her own choice. Thus, preserving one's culture need not always be a consequence of pressure from one's family and community. Here, Sameera does all these things purely of her own

will. The real freedom lies in one's ability to live according to one's choice. However, she is besieged by numerous challenges when she wears a burka.

During her secret journey to meet her friends at SARSA, Sameera used a veil to cover her head, concealing her identity. She notices that a fellow passenger looks at her suspiciously. "A woman on the train gave her a suspicious look. *What's up with her?* Sameera thought. Does she recognize me?" (Perkins, *EAM* 182). On the very same day, she has yet another strange experience. When she asks a woman for directions, the woman welcomes her to become a citizen of America. The incident goes thus:

"You go straight down the street for three blocks, love," the woman said, clutching Sameera's hands. "And please, let me welcome you to America. We're *so* glad you're here and hope you'll consider becoming a citizen of this country." She beamed, peering over the reading glasses she must have forgotten to take off. *An ancient, real-life Statue of Liberty*, Sameera thought. (Perkins, *EAM* 182)

When Sameera responds that she is already an American, the woman clarifies herself, saying, "Really? I thought you *must* be a newcomer, and I vowed, after 9/11 happened back in 2001, always to welcome newcomers, because those terrorists might have thought about what they were about to do if *someone* had been kind to them in this country" (Perkins, *EAM* 182). Sameera realises that it is due to her veil that people act strangely (Perkins, *EAM* 182). Sameera wears a purdah so that she can enjoy her privacy by concealing her identity. She wants to spend some time with her college friends who are from different South Asian countries. She would like to enjoy herself with her new friends without being accompanied by the security staff. Wearing a burka can help her remain anonymous and provide her with a sense of security and

empowerment. Even her mother, Elizabeth, agrees that the burka does provide emancipation when she discovers Sameera's secret life, wandering the streets wearing one. Elizabeth says, "Who would have thought that a burka, of all things, could give our daughter some freedom during this campaign... They have always struck me as being oppressive" (Perkins, *EAM* 230). Thus, the burka is not always a symbol of oppression. It can also be a matter of personal choice, a symbol of liberty. In the novel *White House Rules*, during a conversation with South Asian college students, Mariam shares her negative experiences at school for wearing a headscarf. She says people used to pull her headscarf since she is the only one at their school who wears one (109). Nadia asks Mariam whether she wears one because her parents force her to (109). The conversation goes thus, "

"I sort of get the head scarf thing, but why do you wear a burka?" Nadia asked.

"Do your parents make you?" Mariam's eyes crinkled, and Sameera knew she was smiling at a question that was probably a familiar one. *It's amazing how much the eyes reveal*, Sameera thought. "I wear this because it gives me freedom," Mariam said. "It puts me in charge, because I get to decide who sees me and who doesn't." (109).

Thus, the author uses purdah as a symbol of emancipation. Though Sameera and Mariam enjoy wearing the burka, they are also ill-treated by others, as the burka indicates their identity as Muslims. Muslims are victims of Islamophobia, irrespective of their gender. However, wearing a burqa by Muslim women announces their religious identity, which puts them in trouble. Thus, these girls are denied the right to wear clothes that make them feel comfortable. This can be regarded as a form of marginalisation owing to their ethnicity.

Sameera's Pakistani identity and the probability of her being a Muslim create trouble in her relationship with her boyfriend. Bobby's grandfather hates Muslims because Muslims attacked his family in the past. His parents do not even want his grandfather to know about Bobby's relationship with a Muslim girl.

"They don't want me to be photographed with you in public because they're [Bobby's parents] afraid he'll [Bobby's grandfather] see it. And get stressed out.

"But why? He doesn't even know me. Does he hate Americans or something?"..

"No, no, not that. It's because ... because you're Muslim".She was flabbergasted. "I don't practise Islam."

"Doesn't matter. You're Muslim by birth. And like I told your mom, my family's Hindu. (Perkins, *WHR* 42)

There is no evidence that proves Sameera is a Muslim. As Elizabeth later says, "We've always assumed...you were from a Muslim ... family... because that part of Pakistan...where the orphanage was...is almost all Muslim" (Perkins, *WHR* 57). Thus, it is an assumption that she is a Muslim, as she was adopted from an orphanage, which was situated in an area with a large Muslim population. As she explains to Bobby, she is not practising Islam either. Still, Bobby's family is reluctant to accept Sameera. Bobby explains that it is because she is a Muslim by birth. One of his great uncles was killed by Muslims. Besides, the family lost their jute farm when Muslims took over the village. It is narrated as:

"That was ages ago, Bobby. What does that have to do with me? Or us?" ...

"I've had friends from lots of cultures and traditions, Bobby. Nothing you say is going to sound strange or weird to me, I promise."

...“Dadu’s got this grudge against the Muslims because of his brother’s death, and the jute farm, and with his illness and all...well, Ma and Baba think it might kill him if he knew I was seeing you. Or if we were ever photographed together. So they told me not to call or email you.” (42-43)

Bobby’s parents were afraid that if his grandfather happened to see his photograph along with Sameera, it would be enough to spoil his health. Thus, they strictly forbid him from keeping in touch with Sameera. This illustrates the entrenched hatred towards Muslims in American society, even among other migrant groups.

Gender Disparity in Acquiring Communication Skills

Learning the language of the host land is a crucial target for migrants to achieve in their newly occupied space. Acquisition of a new language helps in forming a new identity. According to the Sapir-Whorf theory, language has a direct relationship to identity, as it determines our thoughts and perceptions (Ramone 102-103). According to this principle, a particular language-speaking community uniformly perceives the world and differs from another language-speaking group (102-103). This theory suggests that language influences our thoughts. Although this concept has been contradicted on various levels, it can be accepted that language acquisition is an inevitable part of assimilation (102-103). Language is also a tool to identify the cultural attachment of a migrant (Chen 110). The acquisition of the language used by the dominant community is a matter of vital importance for migrants. A better command of the language of the host land shows a better level of assimilation. The language the migrants bring along with them is part of their national pride (Portes and Rubén 97). Hence, an immigrant is expected to leave behind their native language and learn the language used by the host community, as it is symbolic of leaving behind one’s culture and adopting a new one

(97). This can also be interpreted as a shift in their loyalty, which was initially towards their country of origin, and has now shifted towards their receiving country.

The lack of proficiency in the host country's language among the first-generation migrants is a matter of concern. This makes their mingling with the host society more challenging. However, the succeeding generations do not suffer from such problems. Their privilege of receiving education in their country of parental settlement enables them to use the language of the host society with accurate pronunciation and accent. Unlike the parents who mostly show a ghetto mentality, the 1.5 generation migrants do their schooling along with the children of the host society. This gives them better exposure to language. This, in turn, enables them to integrate more effectively with the host society. Thus, language acquisition is a daunting task for the settler generation, but it is even more challenging for women belonging to this generation.

The novels in the *First Daughter* series portray the gender disparity in gaining English communication skills. Women from South Asian countries are sometimes less educated and less proficient in English compared to their male counterparts. Even in the diasporic space, women have fewer prospects to socialise. Even if they do get opportunities to mingle, it is mostly with women of their ethnic community. This is because many women from settler generations are not employed in the host country. This provides them with fewer opportunities for socialising with the host society. So, the prospects of improving their language skills are very low for first-generation women.

“Gender, race, place of origin, and language facility are cumulative disadvantages that have economic and social repercussions on women's lives...Their inability to speak English isolates the women, robs them of autonomy, and reinforces their

dependence on their spouses” (Agnew 40-41). In the grocery store incident in the novel *Extreme American Makeover*, Mariam’s grandmother gets into trouble mainly because she could not communicate effectively with the staff in the grocery store. When Sameera visits Mariam’s house just after the incident at the grocery store, Mariam’s mother tells her, “My no good English, but my Mariam speak like her Abba. So good girl she is. Like you” (222). This conversation reveals Mariam’s mother’s limited proficiency in English, whereas Mariam’s father is fluent in the Language. There is gender disparity even in the case of language, as it is evident in the case of the members of Mariam’s family. Mariam’s mother and grandmother are unable to communicate in English as they have less exposure to English language.

In addition to the compulsions to retain their ancestral culture, their social isolation in the settlement country restricts their adaptation process. Once Bobby, Sameera’s boyfriend, says, “My theory is that people are more suspicious about how you sound than how you look” (Perkins, *EAM* 195). The grocery store incident validates Bobby’s theory. The low level of language acquisition makes migrants more vulnerable in the country of immigration. However, adolescent girl migrants usually have better communication skills, as their schooling is often conducted in the country of settlement, which is evident in Mariam's improved communication skills.

Continuation of Gender Norms in the Host Land

In *Extreme American Makeover*, when Sameera saves Mariam’s grandmother from getting arrested by the shopkeeper at the grocery store, Mohammed, Mariam’s father, invites her to his home for lunch. At Mariam’s home, Sameera notices the culture they follow. Sameera, being the daughter of a diplomat for thirteen years, has come into contact with several cultures. Thus, she is familiar with the practices

followed in many South Asian cultures. Mariam's family is from Pakistan. In South Asian families, men typically eat their meal first, and women follow it. When she calls on Mariam's home for the first time, she notices that this practice is still being followed in her family. The family has been staying there for many years, and still, they follow their cultural practice, which is patriarchal. This instance in the novel establishes that South Asian migrants follow the form of patriarchy that is practised in their native land. The clutches of patriarchy continue to grab them in diasporic space as well. While focusing on Sameera, who wishes to assert her ethnic identity, the author also touches upon such practices followed in South Asian migrant families. The author has not made it clear whether the family follows this practice out of any compulsion. However, nobody within the family has taken any initiative to ensure that the family dines together and thereby brings a sort of gender equality within the family.

Sameera's Resistance to Discrimination

The challenges Sameera faces are due to the intersections of her multiple marginalised identities. However, Sameera, like other Perkinsian women characters, deviates from the established gender roles. Despite her considerable efforts to move beyond her marginalised position, she is not completely liberated. However, despite the challenges she faces in her journey to gain freedom for herself and other marginalised people, she continues to resist the discrimination. Though she is not able to completely wipe out the stains of racism from the hearts of all Americans, her father wins the election because she successfully convinces, at least a majority of Americans, of the absurdities of racism. Sameera could do this with her communication skills and wisdom. Her collaboration with a group of South Asian college students, who are also racially discriminated against, enables her to overcome the difficulties.

In her *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, hooks declares, “Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people” (231). Like adolescent female characters in Perkins’ other narratives, Sameera understands the importance of resistance, and she converts her “space of marginality” into a “site of resistance” (232). Marginalised people should be able to produce literature that counters the ideas spread by the hegemonic community. South Asian diasporic women writers can create literature that portrays strong women who are ready to resist the discrimination shown against them, which counters the idea spread by whites that South Asian women are weak and docile.

In “Cultural Reproduction and the Reconstruction of Identities in the Indian Diaspora”, Rayaprol speaks about various strategies adopted by Indian women to ensure “cultural reproduction”. She also observes that “contemporary feminist work challenges the representation of women as passive victims and offers a perspective of women as ‘architects of change’” (16). An in-depth study of the female characters of Perkins demonstrates that they are “architects of change” (16).

Conclusion

Sameera is constantly marginalised owing to her gender, race, Pakistani roots, and possible Muslim ancestry. Though she has few connections with her native land, she is considered a “Paki”. Her brown skin tone invites many racial remarks, which upsets her parents as well.

She faces Islamophobia and xenophobia in several situations. The stress she feels during the election campaign reflects the discrimination against Sameera. The intersection of her gender, racial, and ethnic identities, along with her age, is what causes trouble in her life. Initially, these discriminations make her submissive to the

demands of the campaigning agency, though not full-heartedly. Though initially, she succumbs to the demands of the campaigning agency, very soon she realises that she is made to enact the role of a seductress. Thereafter, Sameera chooses to determine the level of modernity she needs to adopt and the way she should present herself to the public. She also started using her wisdom and excellent communication skills, which enabled her to interact effectively with the public. Through her blog, she could develop and maintain a good image in the public. Thus, she proved that the strategies adopted by the campaigning agency in presenting Sameera to the public were incorrect. It was her wisdom and honest self-presentation that ultimately helped her father to win the election.

Sameera, like other female characters of Perkins, is unwilling to accept her subjugated position. Like other adolescent girl characters of Perkins, Sameera converts the “space of marginality” into a “site of resistance” (hooks 232). In contrast to the “heteronormativity” commonly found in children’s and young adult literature, the adolescent character Sameera does not depend on any adults to achieve her goal of emerging from her marginalised position (Nikolajeva 8). She neither awaits help from her boyfriend nor from some other boy heroes to help her overcome her difficulties. Sameera’s South Asian friends also demonstrate resistance at different levels to protect themselves and their peers from being marginalised. Through strong-willed South Asian female characters, Perkins is denying the picture that white discourses have given to South Asian women. Perkins’ counter-hegemonic writings are, in fact, her own way of resistance in the diasporic space. Perkins’ intense desire to resist the marginalisation faced by her and other South Asian migrants is a significant factor influencing her creativity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Diasporic writers from South Asian countries argue that brown-skinned people also fall victim to racism in a white dominated society. Indian diasporic literature gives a picture of the agonies of Indian migrants in foreign lands. The writings of diasporic Indian women writers focused on the unique experiences of Indian migrant women. The novels of Perkins differ from those of other diasporic women writers in that they are narrated through the perspectives of adolescent girls. These adolescent girls, who are usually considered powerless owing to their age, are the ones who support other female members of their families to transcend their marginalised position.

Crossing boundaries and their consequences are recurring themes in Perkins' writings. Perkins presents the miseries of migrants, with a special emphasis on women migrants from India and Pakistan, in the four novels chosen for study. By showcasing the challenges faced by a Pakistani migrant in two literary works and the experiences of Indian women characters in the other two novels, Perkins conveys the idea that migratory experiences are unique to each migrant, depending on their country of origin, race, religion, and gender.

This study is an examination of the status of women migrants from India and Pakistan settled in white-dominant countries. The investigation has been made to understand whether migrant women from South Asian countries experience more freedom in Western countries, where they decide to settle. Additionally, a close examination of the selected literary texts was conducted to understand the role of adolescent girls in enhancing the position of female migrants in diasporic spaces.

In the initial phase of migration, a migrant is in a liminal stage. The settler generation is more familiar with the culture of their country of origin. They are yet to be familiarised with the culture of the host country. One needs to adapt to the dominant culture of the country of settlement to gain better recognition in the host society. Hence, the migrant is caught between the cultures of their motherland and the country of settlement. This is a challenging phase that the migrants need to surpass.

Besides the hardships related to adaptation, a non-white migrant also experiences racial discrimination in various forms in a country where whites form the majority. The racial discrimination faced by Blacks is widely discussed, while the racial issues of people of colour are often studied in comparison to the issues faced by Blacks. As far as whites are concerned, all non-whites are people of colour. The issues faced by Browns should be studied by considering their culture and ethnicity, which differ from one country to another. However, the present study, which has taken into consideration the problems encountered by women migrants from India and Pakistan settled in white-dominant countries, has been studied through the lens of various theories associated with Black racism. Perkins's characters demonstrate the commonalities and differences in the experiences of women from these two countries.

Women migrants undergo multiple forms of marginalisation owing to their gender, in addition to their race and ethnicity. Though women from South Asian countries migrate to Western nations in expectation of a space of liberty, they are expected to dwell on the cultural values of their ancestral country, which are patriarchal. It does not mean that Western countries are not gender-biased. Nevertheless, gender norms in South Asian countries are more patriarchal. The migrants carry the cultural baggage of their homeland to the diasporic space, and they

practice the gender roles they used to follow in the homeland, in the host land, for a considerable length of time.

Women migrants are not only forced to preserve their ethnic culture but also to transfer it to the next generations. Non-conformity to the conventions can cause women to be subjected to severe judgement. The compulsion to stick to the ancestral culture in the case of women migrants makes the assimilation process of women more challenging than that of male migrants. In Perkins's fictional world, no male character seems to make efforts to remain ethnic. Even first-generation male migrants are not expected to retain their ethnicity. They are free to choose their level of assimilation and are free from such shackles. This is distinct from women migrants of 1.5 and second generations who are forced to stick to their ethnic culture.

Overview of the Chapters

The first chapter, "Introduction", prefaces the thesis and provides a detailed background for the study. A comprehensive literature review helped to identify an epistemic gap in the area and revealed that Perkins' novels have received less attention from academia. Moreover, it was noted that challenges faced by adolescent girls in diasporic spaces and the way they overcome them are also less-researched areas.

The second chapter, "Women Migrants in the Diaspora: Gender Dynamics and Culture Preservation", examines various challenges women migrants navigate through owing to their gender identity and their non-white migrant status. In this chapter, an exhaustive investigation of the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* is carried out, and it points out that women migrants suffer more owing to their gender rather than their race. Their multiple identities, all belonging to marginalised categories,

make their lives in the country of settlement more challenging than those of their male counterparts.

It's not just the pressure on Sunita to retain Indian culture that causes her emotional distress, but witnessing her mother being forced to practice the same also affects her. Ranees started wearing sarees to please her orthodox parents and husband. Sunita, who is used to seeing her mother in Western attire, is disheartened to witness her mother's transformation into a conventional Indian woman. As a result, Sunita started distancing herself from her mother. This points out that a lower level of assimilation of parents in comparison to the higher level of adaptability of children can cause inter-generational issues within families.

Constant exposure to racist remarks can negatively influence the victims. This affects teenagers more than others because it is during the adolescent period that one's identity is formed. The character Sunita in *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* showcases the identity crisis and emotional struggles of an adolescent migrant girl. The discrimination female migrants face owing to their gender, in addition to the racial discrimination and other problems any migrant encounters, makes the migratory process of female migrants more challenging than that of males.

The narrative depicts female migrants, regardless of their ordinal status as migrants, as facing several challenges. Once Sunita comes to terms with her identity, she helps her mother overcome her marginalised status. Usually, in young adult literature, adolescent characters achieve something with the help of adults. However, Perkins subverts this idea by making the adolescent character bold enough to handle the situation, thereby implying that what is actually required is not authority but strong willpower to encounter the demanding circumstances.

The novel purports that it is Sunita, the adolescent girl in the narrative, who helped her mother move out of the marginalised position. Additionally, it was Sunita who took the initiative to convince her grandparents to support her mother to rejoin the college from which she had taken a year-long leave. Instead of creating stereotypical characters, the author creates bold and relentless characters like Sunita who can influence others. Perkins also deviates from the stereotypical portrayal of adolescent girls who wait for a male hero who rescue them.

The third chapter, “Female Migrants in Diaspora: A Study across Generations”, was incorporated to understand whether women migrants of higher generations enjoy better liberty in comparison to the women of the settler generation. The chapter analyses the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* to understand the difference in migratory experiences of women belonging to different generations. The narrative is an account of the migratory experiences of five female migrants belonging to three different generations of the Das family.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the oppression of women in the Indian marriage system. Raneer was married at a young age, and she was given no choice by the patriarchal society. Marriage imposes further restrictions on women’s lives. Raneer says she did not have any freedom at her husband’s home. Moreover, she was criticised by her mother and mother-in-law for not bearing a son. This shows that women are targeted not just at their husband’s home, but at their parents’ home as well.

An interesting aspect noted in the novel is that even the granddaughters of the settler generation are forced to preserve the culture of their ancestral land. At the same time, even the first-generation male migrants are free to adapt to the mainstream culture of the host land. This reveals the gender disparity in retaining the cultural values of the

country of origin. The external interference in their adaptation process makes their migratory experience more challenging than that of their male counterparts. The gendered aspect of cultural representation in the novel is similar to its discussion in *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*.

The novel *You Bring the Distant Near* makes it evident that migration does not ensure the financial independence of women. Raneer, the first-generation woman character, remains unemployed despite her remarkable talent in music and sewing. The cultural tradition dictates that women do not need to gain economic independence. Migration does not ensure the financial autonomy of women. Repeated advice given by Raneer to her daughters, Tara and Sonia, shows her frustration, which stems from her lack of financial independence. The migrant women remain dependent on their husbands for their financial needs. In the homeland, employed women are supported either by their parents or their in-laws in raising their children. However, in diasporic space, the upbringing of children becomes the sole responsibility of women. This often prevents them from pursuing their passions or careers. In *You Bring the Distant Near*, the upbringing of Tara and Sonia is entirely Raneer's responsibility. It is Raneer who enrolls her children in the first school they joined after settling in America. Imparting cultural values was also a responsibility of Raneer.

Another major aspect that the author explores in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* is colourism suffered by adolescents in their own community. Sonia Das was constantly taunted by her mother and other members of her own community for her dark skin. Women are always expected to be good-looking regardless of their age. Sonia is a highly talented girl with excellent academic records. However, these are often overlooked even by her mother. Raneer's pressure on Sonia to use skin-brightening cream and her refusal to use the same cause friction in the mother-daughter

relationship. Also, Ranees' parenting style, which is not in line with the cultural norms of the host land, makes her relationship with Sonia problematic.

The narrative also spotlights the key issue of language acquisition of first-generation women migrants. Once Rajeev reaches America, he sets out to master the American English dialect. However, Ranees, who is also a first-generation migrant like Rajeev, does not become proficient in English even at her prime age. This reflects the limited exposure she gets in the diasporic space. However, language learning does not become a concern for the next generations, irrespective of their gender, as they do their schooling in the host land.

The novel captures many instances where adolescent girls are being restricted from going out alone. Parents place such limitations on children to protect them from potential dangers that could be inflicted on them owing to their race and gender. Therefore, it is clear that women are not completely safe in so-called liberal countries as well.

Unlike their mother, the Das children adapt to the hegemonic culture easily, since they have enough exposure to understand the culture of the host land. Their schooling in the country of settlement makes them aware of the cultural practices followed in the receiving country. This makes their adaptation process a little less challenging than their mother's. However, they are also forced to practice Indian culture, which they resist in several instances. They are not willing to remain submissive; rather, they challenge the established norms of patriarchy. Their determination and support help Ranees to take bold decisions in many situations. When Das suggests returning to India, they stand against Das's suggestion, and this camaraderie among the Das women helps them to continue living in the host land.

Returning to India means all three women will have to suffer in their own way, owing to their gender.

Nostalgia for one's homeland is one of the key features of any diasporic literature. Perkins makes her work unique by limiting the discussion of this aspect. Only Rajeev in *You Bring the Distant Near* shows such feelings for his homeland, where he was born. And that was about Bangladesh, where he spent his childhood. His family lost their home after the partition. He often considers returning to India. However, the author points out that even the first-generation women do not choose to return to their motherland, despite the challenges they face in the diasporic space. This is because, though they do not enjoy absolute liberty in diasporic space, they can assert their rights to a small extent.

The novel *You Bring the Distant Near* demonstrates that the difficulties faced by different generations of women migrants are different. The first generation of women migrants finds it difficult to adapt to the hegemonic culture of the country of settlement, as they are simultaneously compelled by their family members and the co-ethnic community to retain their ethnic culture and are also required to adapt to the host land. While all migrants, irrespective of gender, are stressed to adapt to the host culture, it is only women migrants who are simultaneously forced to stick to their ethnic culture. This type of difficulty is faced mainly by first-generation women migrants. However, that does not mean that the pressure to retain ethnicity ends with the first-generation female migrants. The textual analysis of the novels subjected to the study indicates that the pressure to preserve ancestral culture continues for the 1.5 and second-generation women migrants as well, though nobody interferes in their adaptation process of even for the first-generation male migrants.

The 1.5-generation and second-generation migrants also suffer from identity crises. The girls of the next generation suffer from an identity crisis during their adolescence because of the pressure on them to retain their ancestral culture. They are more accustomed to the hegemonic culture of their parental country of settlement. The country of settlement is the home country of the second generation because they were born there. In most cases, they are more assimilated than their parents. Thus, it is difficult for them to follow their ancestral culture. Though they are culturally indistinguishable from the host community, their genetic features reveal their race, which makes them subject to racism. This puts them under emotional pressure. They feel that they neither belong to their ancestral country nor to the country of settlement. Migrants of subsequent generations undergo emotional conflicts during their adolescence. They pass through several challenging situations before they come to terms with their hybrid identity. White-dominant countries easily accept white migrants from other countries. However, non-white migrants, even the higher generations who are assimilated into the host culture, are not accepted.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Intersectional Marginalities: Girlhood in Diasporic Space”, examines the novels *Extreme American Makeover* and *White House Rules*, which form the novel series *First Daughter*. The novels represent the lives of many South Asian migrants, focusing on the life of Sameera, an adolescent girl, a Pakistani by birth. She was adopted by a white couple when she was three years old. Through the novels, Perkins demonstrates the troubles faced by Sameera because of the intersections of multiple marginalised identities.

Even though Sameera’s foster family showers love upon her, it is not a reflection of the attitude of the entire American society. When her foster father, Righton, stands for the Presidential election, the society reveals its prejudice against

Sameera, pointing out that she is a Pakistani by origin. Sameera is also unjustly targeted because of her alleged Muslim identity. Sameera's Muslim identity is not confirmed, though her adoptive parents assumed that she must be a Muslim by birth. Even the probability of her being a Muslim makes her a target of American society. The intersection of her racial and her probable Muslim identity stands against her father's chances of winning the election. Adding to her woes, she also suffers owing to her gender. The campaigning agency tries to make her play the role of a seductress by compelling her to undergo an "extreme American makeover". They want Sameera to look beautiful and attract many youngsters with her looks. The campaigning staff also want Sameera to appear as a typical American girl, so that the racially biased American society will be at least pleased to see her high level of adaptation. This is a clear instance of "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 139), as this instance of oppression can be attributed to the intersection of her gender and race. Sameera would not have been forced to appear American if she had been White. She would not have been urged to please the American public with her looks if she had been a boy.

Sameera, with her good communication skills and wisdom, helps her father win the election. Sameera tries to assert herself strongly from her marginalised position. Sameera, like other adolescent characters of Perkins, converts the "site of deprivation" to a "space of resistance" (hooks 230). A strong camaraderie can be seen among Sameera, Mariam and the college students with South Asian ancestry. They share their racial experiences with Sameera, which expand her understanding of the racial biases that exist in America.

While in the novels *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* and *You Bring the Distant Near*, the author discusses the pressure on women to represent their ancestral culture, Perkins demonstrates the struggles of female characters who choose to

project their ethnic identity in the *First Daughter* series. Sameera and her friend Mariam are representatives of female migrants who choose to retain their ethnic identity. When Sameera goes out to meet her friends, she opts to wear a purdah so that her identity will not be revealed and she can maintain her privacy. Wearing a purdah was her choice. However, she faces several odd behaviours from the public during her secret journey. Eventually, she understands that her attire reveals her as a Muslim, and strange behaviour of people can be attributed to it. The novelist outlines how a Muslim woman is marginalised since her religious identity is easily recognisable from her attire. Therefore, a South Asian woman suffers because of her choice of costume. Either she displeases her family and co-ethnic members, or the hegemonic community. Anyway, people expect certain things that women need to comply with. Her choices are of the least concern.

The novel *White House Rules* narrates the experiences of Sameera as the First Daughter, who suffers from the intersection of her various marginalised identities. Sameera's father's new role as American President did not put an end to the discrimination targeted against her. However, Sameera, like other female characters of Perkins, does not succumb to discrimination.

Positioned as the fifth chapter of the thesis, this section, titled "Conclusion", synthesises the key topics discussed in the previous chapters and the findings. The chapter's structure includes the key sub-sections of introduction, an overview of the chapters, findings and finally, the chapter also delineates the limitations of the present study.

The present study makes a significant contribution to the field of diasporic studies and to the field of young adolescent literature. The sixth chapter, “Recommendations”, outlines how these studies can be further extended.

The thesis concludes with the complete list of works cited.

Findings

The study has analysed select novels by Perkins to understand the position of South Asian women migrants in Western countries. The status of women from India and Pakistan is taken to represent South Asian women migrants. Except for the opening scene in *You Bring the Distant Near*, which is set in the UK, all four novels subjected to the study are set in the US. With the few scenes in the UK and all the remaining scenes in the US, the setting of the novels represents the white-dominant countries. All the novels expose racism that exists in a white dominant country.

Women are treated as the “Second Sex” (de Beauvoir) in most parts of the world. The society is structured in such a way that women do not enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts. The condition of women in Western countries is not different. However, the form of patriarchy that exists in South Asian countries is more stringent. This motivates women of these countries to consider migrating to Western nations, as represented through the character of Rane Das in *You Bring the Distant Near*. They expect they will have absolute freedom in the diasporic space. What awaits them in the diasporic space is in sharp contradiction to what they had expected before migrating. Soon after migrating, they realise that they would continue to be marginalised in the diasporic space. A thorough investigation of the novel revealed that women migrants do not achieve absolute freedom in diasporic space. In fact, the gender norms of their homeland become more stringent in the initial days of settlement.

Women of the primary generations are forced to retain and pass on the ancestral culture to the women of the next generations. A significant challenge faced by female migrants is the pressure to represent their ancestral culture. Women characters in Perkins' novels, Ranee Das and Ranee Sen, are shown as succumbing to their families' and co-ethnic community members' demands to retain the culture of their homeland. Many women migrants remain unemployed and less socialised; consequently, they do not learn the language and cultural values of the host land. The adolescent girls also fall victim to gender discrimination. As they step into adolescence, they become victim of racism as well. They also realise the differences in the cultural values of their homeland and the host land. Since the adolescent girls are more exposed to the culture of the host land, culturally, they are Westernised. Despite being assimilated, their skin tone and other physical features proclaim their racial identity, which makes them vulnerable to racism. This causes emotional turmoil for the teenagers. A major objective of the research is to understand the identity crisis suffered by women due to displacement and how it has been depicted in literary works. A close examination of the novel suggests that the settler generation does not suffer from an identity crisis, as they are familiar with and inclined towards their ancestral land. However, the adolescent characters take a longer period to accept their hybrid identity. Female migrants suffer more because of the pressure thrust on them to preserve their ancestral culture. A careful reading of the novel *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* points out that South Asian women in diasporic space suffer more from sexism than racism, conforming to the notion of Amba Pande.

One of the main objectives of the study is to examine the differences in the impact of migration on the first generation of women and subsequent generations, as well as how this has been portrayed in select novels by Perkins. An in-depth analysis of

the novels demonstrates that the problems encountered by different generations of migrants vary. Even though the settler generation women are the ones who suffer more from the pressure of cultural continuity, a profound engagement with the novels reveals that women of 1.5 and second generations also suffer from the same, but with less intensity. However, the problems suffered by female migrants of different generations are gendered.

Even if the migration does not guarantee liberty to South Asian women migrants, all the novels chronicle instances where women enjoy better freedom than they would have enjoyed in a similar situation in their homeland. All the occurrences in the novels where women enjoy their rights are the outcome of the resistance they make. In the case of Rane Das, her act of pressurising her husband to migrate to a Western country was her first step of resistance she made against the discrimination she faced in their homeland. In diasporic space, whatever liberty she achieves is in support of her adolescent daughters and later teenage grandchildren. Therefore, what matters is the resilient nature of female migrants.

In the novels, all the female characters are portrayed as suffering on multiple grounds, like race, gender, religion, and also age, in the case of adolescent girls. However, adolescents, despite lacking any authority, come forward and try to emerge from their marginalised status. They understand that as they grow older, they will continue to be marginalised, perhaps on more grounds and with higher intensity. The emotional chaos the adult women members of their families undergo owing to sexism makes the adolescent girls empathetic towards them. This prompts the adolescent girls to resist the discrimination targeted against the female members of their families. Adult women are shown as initially succumbing to the discrimination targeted against them. However, adolescent girls raise their voice against the unfair treatment of themselves

and adult women and stand firm for their rights. The adolescent girls convert the site of marginalisation into a site of resistance. The adolescents are depicted as providing a helping hand to each other and to the adult women to overcome various challenges. A sort of camaraderie among the female migrants helps them emerge from their marginalised status. The marginalised women migrants do not remain so, but transcend their discriminated status in the course of time with the help of adolescent girls.

Perkins' novels propose "female migrant camaraderie" as a solution to the marginalisation women migrants face in the diasporic space. Conventionally, in children's literature, children attain ultimate victory with the help of adults. Girls are portrayed as waiting for a boy hero who comes to their rescue. However, Perkins deviates from these conventions by portraying strong adolescent girl characters who help themselves and even adult women to emerge from their marginalised status.

It is also concluded that the space Perkins occupied influenced her creativity. The writer herself converts the site of marginalisation into a site of resistance by producing counter-hegemonic discourse which presents strong female characters. Her novels are capsules for those who are similarly marginalised, which can enable them to emerge from their marginalised status.

A detailed investigation of the novels demonstrates that despite the differences, there are several common norms that can be found in the cultures of different South Asian countries. The pressure on women to be the cultural harbingers and an intense form of patriarchy are some of the common aspects found in Indian and Pakistani culture, which can be taken as a representation of the entire South Asian countries.

Limitations of the Study

Several studies have been conducted to understand the experiences of adult women migrants. This research, on the contrary, extends the usual focus on women to the experiences of adolescent girls, which makes this research unique. As the novels of Perkins excel in the area, they are posited as a worthy contestant for the study. The study is therefore a significant contribution to research on diasporic literature and also young adult literature.

The author's focus on the female experiences of migration prompted the researcher to focus on the same. In an era that celebrates gender diversity, limiting the study to female experiences is a narrow perspective. However, the research span is too short to understand the diasporic experiences of different genders.

The study could have utilised more concepts from spatial theory and gender theory if not for the time constraints. More novels by Perkins that discuss several other aspects of migration could have been included, but were excluded from this study, as the aim of the current study is to emphasise the issues of female migrants. Moreover, a comparative study with similar works of other authors would have provided a deeper understanding on the study. Another challenge encountered was the lack of secondary material, which was mostly confined to a few research articles.

The study seeks to understand the unique experiences of female migrants from South Asian countries. While South Asians share commonalities like race, skin colour and some cultural practices, there is a range of cultural practices and other factors that demonstrate that South Asians are not a monolithic group. Even though many cultural practices, race and skin tone are a few commonalities that can be found in South Asians, various factors, including many cultural practices, differentiate them from each

other. The female characters analysed in this study from the novels *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* and *You Bring the Distant Near* are treated as representatives of India. However, India is a land of diversity, distinguished by a multitude of cultures, languages, and religions, among others. The problems faced by women vary from place to place, which means they can differ for women who belong to different regions within India. Thus, while discussing the concerns of Indian women in their homeland, the conclusions cannot encompass the difficulties faced by women of the entire country. However, when they go abroad, they are treated as Indians by the host community, irrespective of the region they hail from, which made this study possible.

Multiple attempts to contact the author were not successful, which would have broadened the scope of the current study.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

The focus of this study is to understand the diasporic experiences of South Asian women migrants in white-dominant countries, as shown in the novels of Mitali Perkins. The study points out how diasporic experiences are more challenging for women than men. The present study deviates from the conventional studies in that it takes into consideration the role played by adolescent girls in helping themselves and adult women who are similarly marginalised to transcend their discriminated status.

When the diasporic studies shifted its focus to its gender aspects, it began to concentrate on diasporic experiences of women. Though the novels selected for the study do not provide the scope, studies can also be done using the theoretical framework of Masculine studies, based on other diasporic writers. Diasporic experience of men is a largely ignored area in academia. The scope of the investigation can be further enhanced by including the status of third gender migrants and migrants with different sexual orientations. The intersectional experiences of disabled migrants can also be examined. The research scope can also be deepened by comparing the work of Perkins with that of other writers.

The *First Daughter* series demonstrates the challenges faced by a transracial brown-skinned girl from Pakistan. This study has scrutinised her experiences using various theories of feminism. Adoption is a vast sub-area within the broad area of diaspora, which involves several problematic concerns that need to be addressed. This can be further investigated based on the novels.

The research can be advanced by investigating how migrant women make use of social media and other advanced technologies to maintain their connection with their roots, as well as to maintain the culture of their homeland.

The characters in the Perkins' novels come within the framework of middle-class or upper-middle-class families. The diasporic experiences of economically backward women migrants are significantly different from the diasporic experiences of women migrants belonging to financially sound families. Thus, the study can be developed by incorporating the aspect of social class of the migrants.

The present study focused on social migrants. Future researchers can consider women who migrate as primary breadwinners, who can be classified as economic migrants.

Notes

¹ Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pseudonym bell hooks, insisted that her pen name should be written in lowercase so that her idea would receive more focus than her own identity.

² The researcher has used words like “Sen family”, “Das family” and “Das children” conforming to the author’s choice of words. The practice of identifying a family unit solely by the name of its male head underscores the profound patriarchal structure embedded within society.

³ Inclusive literature features a wide range of characters, cultures, and experiences. It offers readers both reflections of their own reality (mirrors) and insights into unfamiliar worlds (windows), thereby inculcating empathy and expanding perspective.

⁴ Female migrant camaraderie is a new coinage made by the researcher in this study to denote the solidarity found among the female migrant characters, which helps them to emerge from their marginalised position.

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