

INTRODUCTION

The world is accelerating and contracting at one and the same time; material and immaterial borders are blurring and becoming permeable; the old nation states are imploding while new ones are emerging; the global permeates the local, while the local dissipates into the global; and the production of human identity is informed by new coordinates.

(Soren Frank, *Migration and Literature* 2)

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact... we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

(Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Rutherford, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* 222)

Migration literature deals with issues pertaining to migration and resettlement. It is concerned with the themes of alienation in a foreign land, longing for the homeland, negotiating cultural differences, generational conflict, etc. The very nature of migration implies a journey and not an end. Promised lands are never as they are imagined and besides, there is always the probability that the journey changes the individual so that the one who arrives at the promised land is not the person who set out for it.

In contemporary times, migration literature has become popular under the aegis of Diaspora Studies. The historical events of the early twentieth century resulted in the creation of disparate diasporic communities in different parts of the world. The writings by people from such communities are known as diasporic writings. It may be pointed out here that Soren Frank distinguishes between migration literature and migrant literature. According to him, migrant literature is produced by migrants while migration literature deals with migration in form and content (Frank 2, 3). Migration literature comprises fictional narratives, autobiographical narratives, autobiographical fictions, etc. This dissertation will focus on fictional narratives of migration.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of writers from many other communities/ethnic backgrounds in the United States (US). There was a sudden proliferation of writings from different immigrant communities. More and more women began to write which resulted for the first time in the representation of the non white, “ethnic”, immigrant women experience. The feminization of migration that has come to occupy the limelight in recent international migration studies has found widespread representation in the work of fiction produced during this time. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976) remains a seminal book despite its many criticisms because of the way it invented a new language for women’s fiction. Immigrant narratives could no longer restrict itself to the recording of one’s experience. Instead writing had become a weapon of criticism – a counter of resistance – that threatened to shred to tatters the complacency of its readers as well as the wider society.

When it comes to Asian American literature, the first hurdle one faces is regarding the definition of an Asian American. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong addresses this issue in detail and reaches the conclusion that there is no clarity of opinion as to who is one; that although publicly the term has become widely accepted, in individual life, people continue to define themselves by their subgroup (1993). As Asian American literary culture came to be recognized as a category in the late 60s and 70s, there was an urgent need to decide upon what and who can be construed as Asian American. The editors of the seminal *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Frank Chin, et al. 1974) assume that “a true Asian American sensibility is non-Christian, nonfeminine, and non-immigrant” (Wong 8). They also limit Asian Americans to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino. Since then different Asian American anthologies have gone on to include other sub groups. As Wong says, Asian American literature can at best be called a “textual coalition”, since the very identity of Asian American was created during the Asian American Movement (AAM) in response to the racial discrimination by a white people who did not racially discriminate among Asians. Since coalitions by definition are formed by disparate elements coming together, it is small wonder then that there has always been resistance by some of the sub groups to this notion of panethnicity. There is a tendency to exclude Asian Americans from South Asia from the narrative of “Asian American”. Moreover the panethnicity that is assumed/created by the Asian American, fails to be an inclusive category, outside the literary world.

In real life, people of South Asian origin do face a different set of problems in the United States. Particularly since 9/11, the treatment meted out to South Asians has brought out their differences from other Asian Americans into sharp focus. Ariela Schachter has traced the different reasons why panethnicity does not have as strong an appeal for the South Asian origin people in general and the Indian American community in particular. The people of South Asian origin were never a part of the original AAM since at the time their population was far less. It was only in the 80s that Indians were finally considered a population significant in number enough to warrant racial identification, as a consequence of which Indians came to be categorized as “Asian Indians”, a subset of the Asian racial category. Moreover unlike the other Asian American communities who tended to belong to poor socio-economic background, Indian Americans or people of South Asian origin, tended to be English speaking and affiliated to a comparatively prosperous background. Also, till 9/11, people of South Asian origin in the United States had no cause to seek out a panethnic identity. There was no commonality of discrimination to align their cause with the greater Asian American community. Post 9/11 though, the discrimination targeted towards them has been a result more of their nationality than any racial affiliation, and as such it again fails to inspire a panethnic identity (Schachter). In fact such discrimination has worked towards making Asian Indians or people of South Asian descent feel more alienated from the Asian American community. This study also acknowledges that despite the fact that more assimilated Asian Indians might tend to identify themselves as Black or White than Asians, a more aware second generation is likely to embrace panethnicity to further their own interests as member of a shared coalition. In light of such development, I felt it would be interesting to juxtapose the experience of Indian and Pakistani Americans with Chinese and Korean Americans as revealed in contemporary literature of immigration.

It may be mentioned that the year 1952 saw all Asian Americans finally earning the right to become naturalized citizens after centuries of racial discrimination. Following that, the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 had far reaching consequences in the overall demographic presence in the United States. A lot of factors that had nothing to do with immigrants or their rights contributed to the passing of this Act. The 1960s saw the height of the Cold War. Vijay Prashad has talked about the “moral panic” that beset the United States following the Russian venture into space. The need of the hour was scientific advancement and technological expertise but the culture of the time did not

encourage the drive for bookish knowledge encouraged by the flamboyant rebellious image of James Dean and Marlon Brando. This ultimately led to President Kennedy demanding a change to immigration laws that would make it easier for “highly trained or skilled persons” to immigrate to the United States, to attract “talented people who would be helpful to our economy and our culture” (Kennedy as quoted in Prashad 79). Also the United States felt compelled to present itself as a more democratic land offering equal opportunity on the face of the threat posed by a growing communism. This ultimately led to the Act of 1965 that “abolished the restrictive national origins regulations originally passed in 1921 and 1924 in favor of a quota and preference system” (Le).

The Act favoured family reunification as well as the immigration of skilled workers into the United States. Considering the very tiny Asian American population, the government had not expected that too many Asian Americans would enter the country through the family reunification program. As expected, the largest number of Asians who came through in the first few years consisted of professionals and workers. But over time, as they earned citizenship, and started bringing in their families, immigration of Asian Americans became very high and that consequently changed the demographic pattern in the United States forever. This Act is the reason why Asian Americans coming in after 1965 largely belonged to a different socio-economic stratum than earlier immigrants, which in turn affected the kind of discrimination that they faced. That notwithstanding, Asian Americans continued to thrive or at least endure against heavy odds like the US deportation law, and some of them have emerged as powerful writers.

Multi ethnic literature is at an all time high in the United States. As second generation writers have come to wield their pens, immigrant writing has become more accessible to, as well as popular with, mainstream America. From the experimental magical realism of Junot Diaz to the unapologetic celebration of Asian wealth in Kevin Kwan, contemporary American migration literature encompasses a *mélange* of themes, structures, tones and genres.

Since the critical and commercial success of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Warrior Woman*, Asian American literature has come to be a popular genre among the masses, no longer relegated to activism level literature. With *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Amy Tan further made inroads into mainstream acceptance with her evocative tales of immigrant intergenerational mother-daughter conflicts. Amy Tan paved the way for a wider

acceptance of Asian American writers, although one cannot but agree with Frank Chin's criticism of her works as pandering to the West's image of the "Oriental". Around the same time, Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) received much support and critical acclaim. She brought to light the "Chinese bachelor society, a generation of old timers who, because of a whole series of conditions—exclusion and miscegenation laws, revolutions in China—came to this country to work and ended up not being able to return home" (Ng). Chinese American literature is one prolific field with newer authors like Jean Kwok, Celeste Ng, et al. contributing to it in recent times.

Chang-Rae Lee's debut novel, *The Native Speaker* (1995), is arguably the first Korean American novel to earn the attention of the general American reading community, establishing Lee as a brilliant storyteller. The 90s was a good time for Korean American literature when apart from Lee, writers like Susan Choi, Patti Kim, et al. started to publish their work. The twenty first century saw the further growth of Korean American literature with the coming of writers like Suki Kim, Min Jin Lee, Alexander Chee, et al. With the arrival of these writers in the scene, the uniqueness of the Korean American immigrant experience is finally reaching the wider audience.

When it comes to Americans of South Asian descent, they find themselves in the unenviable position of living an immigrant experience vastly different from other Asian Americans. This is as much because of geopolitical reasons as it is because of the fact that many South Asians differ from other Asians in physical appearance. Despite the American census' decision to lump all people from the Asian continent under the racial definition of "Asian", the Asian continent is home to different races with very different physical attributes. The South Asians in the United States have a commonality of experience that they do not share with other Asian Americans. For this reason, their literature varies from "Asian American literature" in some key aspects.

Indian American literature of late has been met with huge acclaim both in the fields of fiction and non-fiction. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the early Indian American novelists who has been writing about immigrant issues in her novels since the 70s. Around the turn of the century, a whole new batch of writers burst upon the scene. From the finely crafted, sedate works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Akhil Sharma or Shanthi Sekaran to the more trendy and upbeat works of Desi Chick lit writers like Monica Pradhan, Kavita Daswani, et al., Indian American literature is broadening into a more eclectic field.

Similarly Pakistani American literature seemed to have developed most strongly only after 9/11. It was as if the very discrimination facing the community made it imperative for the community to register its protest through the indirect means of fiction. The aftermath of 9/11 saw writers like Mohsin Hamid, HM Naqvi, Shaila Abdullah explicitly writing about how the events of 9/11 went on to impact the Pakistani American community. The themes and concerns expressed in Pakistani American literature too seem to differ from what is predominantly called “Asian American” literature. One good reason might be because unlike the Chinese or the Japanese who saw the worst of persecution at specific points in their American history, Pakistani American is living through the same heightened persecution in the present times.

The objectives of the present study are:

- 1) To study migration as an act of geographical, cultural and psychological negotiation and the mode of addressing it through the rhetoric of nostalgia, loss, silence and trauma
- 2) To study how the process of diasporic mobility works through varying, often conflicting, notions of culture, education, work, gender and resistance, food habits, etc.
- 3) To examine the problematics of assimilation with the larger ‘host’ community as far as immigrants are concerned; whether there is an attempt on the part of the majority community to highlight and maintain the differences in the migrant communities
- 4) Given the multi-racial situation and the problematic status of the migrants in America, to study how their experience is presented in their fictional narratives through counters of resistance

This project begins with the following hypotheses:

- i) that when people leave home, they carry their original ethnic identities even as they consciously work towards acceptance in the host country;
- ii) that immigration creates a transcultural identity in the children who draw upon parental tradition and the new culture/cultures; that despite the difference in experiences of the different ethnic communities based on their race, class, gender and religion, the diasporic communities all share some similarity of experience;

- iii) that attempts at integration and transnational practices amongst the migrants are not incompatible;
- iv) that the retention of ethnic identities amongst the diasporic/migrant communities is not a defensive strategy but aimed at distinctiveness and empowerment within the host country and also the country of origin.

Methodology

The primary thrust of the dissertation is to analyze American mobility narratives from a host of diasporic groups. To that end, this project seeks to combine tools of postcolonial and socio-cultural theories of migration, paying special attention to the politics of race and ethnicity, gender and identity formation.

Review of Literature

Broadly speaking, the material under review can be divided into four main groups:

- a) The first category includes works on the **history and sociological theory of migration**: Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), Donna Gabaccia and Colin Wayne Leach (2004), Robin Cohen (2008), David Gerber (2011), Sara Ahmed, et al. (2003) to name a few.

Hondagneu-Sotelo focuses on issues of gender and immigration in the United States. She identifies three stages of feminist research on immigration. Commenting on how initial research on immigration excluded women subjects from its area of study, she observes that it was only in the 1970s and 80s that feminist scholarship developed to address this. But this “writing women into the research” (5) came with its own problems. It “further marginalized immigrant women into a segregated subfield, separate from major social dynamics of immigration” (6). When women’s migration was explained through the “sex role paradigm”, the segregation of various work based on one’s sex came to be seen as complementary, this in turn normalizing the idea of the public and the private reigns while neglecting the “relational, contested and negotiated” aspects between the two and ignoring the “power, privilege, and subordination” that determines and at the same time is the result of such a divide. She rightly contends that, “The preoccupation with writing women into migration research and theory stifled theorizing about the ways in which constructions of femininities and masculinities organize migration and migration outcomes” (6). She talks about how globalization contributes to the feminization of

migration by encouraging female immigration from third world countries. Later research on migration, what she identifies as the second stage, marked a shift from women to gender, bringing into its scope how men are impacted – “constrained and enabled” – by gender as well as how gender plays out in immigrant families. It was realized then that immigrant men from different cultural backgrounds may for the first time in the United States, come to occupy “subordinate positions in class, racial, and citizenship hierarchies”, resulting in nostalgia and a desire to move back to the homeland (8). But this method of criticism fails to take into account how gender works out at the wider level beyond the family or social interactions. The gendered dimension to the work force is completely neglected as is the workings of gender in more official institutions like law and politics. Identifying the current stage of feminist research into immigration as the third stage, Hondagneu-Sotelo claims that current research looks into gender as a “constitutive element of immigration” that affects many “practices, identities, and institutions” of immigration. It studies gender as impacting “patterns of labor incorporation, globalization, religious practice and values, ethnic enclave businesses, citizenship, sexuality, and ethnic identity” (9). My study does not directly address gender but I have tried to study how gender impacts the immigrant experience.

Donna Gabaccia and Colin Wayne Leach examine how migration changes human subjectivity in terms of identity and experience based on place and socio-economic relations. This is significant because of the constantly changing multicultural set up in America. They talk about how the United States “functions symbolically as a hyper-present model of a culturally plural or multicultural nation of individuals with complex identities.” This, they claim, is a recent development. Historically, America had insisted on either transforming identities or excluding a people, but the twentieth century sees immigrants resisting such influence. Gabaccia and Leach also study the impact of globalization on the United States, apart from seeing it as a globalizing agent spreading neo-colonialism across the world (3). Assuming the normalcy of human mobility as a point of departure, they observe that identity formation for immigrants often takes place in zones of contact. For adult first generation immigrants, workplaces are often sites for identity formation, whereas “for their children (including both the so called 1.5 generation – born abroad but migrating as children – and the second generation – born in the US) social relations” within families and social institutions become more important (6). This often results in the production of very different identities determined by very

different situations, but sadly leading to intergenerational conflict within immigrant families. Gabaccia and Leach call for studying the immigrant as an ordinary person leading a complicated full life (192), making a case about how the scholars dealing with migration are very much “on the move” like the subjects they study (200). In the books studied in this dissertation, their arguments become pertinent as these books written post 1990 reveal the effects of globalization within the United States. Their account of identity formation at different contact zones for adult immigrants and their children and the consequent generational gap too is seen carried out in most of the texts.

Linda Basch, et al. highlight the aspect of transnationalism amongst the migrant communities and suggest that immigrants often ‘forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (8). They argue that the earlier notion of immigrants as people who have permanently left behind their homeland and migrants as a more temporary mobile people who keep moving between places no longer holds good in the light of increasing transnationalism by which immigrants are becoming more actively involved in the affairs of the home country. They see transnational migration as a direct consequence of global capitalism. They create the term “transmigrants” to describe immigrants who maintain “multiple relationships—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders” (9). However they also contend that in light of the continued hegemonic authority that nation states continue to exert on its people, it is only in fiction that the idea of transnationalism has found full voice. This transnationalism finds expression in most of the novels under study. The various novels incorporate transnationalism in the immediate familial level as well as in the community level and goes on to exert economic impact.

Sara Ahmed, et al. challenge the “naturalization of homes as origins, and the romanticization of mobility as travel, transcendence and transformation.” They claim that the duality of home and migration cannot be understood properly without addressing the “spatialized relations of power” through which it works. They say, “Mobility can be foisted upon bodies through homelessness, exile and forced migration just as the purported comforts of the familial ‘home’ may be sites of alienation and violence (for women, children, queers). The founding of homelands and places of belonging can entail the displacement of others from their homes” (6). The book attempts to problematize as well as rethink the relationship between the individual, home and mobility. It questions

the idea of familial homes and home-as-familiarity, as well as questioning the premises like race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. that determine who can be mobile.

b) The second category deals with the **politics of migration and its representation** in literature: Linda Joyce Brown (2005), Soren Frank (2008), Sten Pultz Moslund (2010) and others.

Linda Joyce Brown talks about immigrant women writers of the early twentieth century. She claims that writers like Willa Cather, Sui Sin Far, et al. variously challenged and shaped the very concept of whiteness by reifying and resisting “hegemonic racial ideology” (2005). Although she does not refer to Bhabha, her assertion about how immigrants enter the racial fabric of the country and changes it is very much in keeping with the idea of Bhabha’s hybridity and thirdspace. The immigrant woman’s body is a site of much fear because she through her fecundity threatens the image of a country like nothing else. Analyzing texts as racial projects, she discusses the texts in relation to the power structures of the time when what she calls “the most restrictive immigration legislation to date” – the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed (Preface). In light of the fact that in my dissertation I discuss the representation of the immigrant condition as affected by the Immigration Act of 1965, Brown’s work helps in understanding how literature often acts as projects of racial formation.

Soren Frank distinguishes between migrant literature and migration literature and proposes migration literature as based on content than authorial biographical background. To him, migration literature is as much about form as it is about theme. He mentions how Roy Sommer divides “contemporary ‘ethnic’ literature in Britain” written by successive generation of immigrants for whom “dichotomies such as center-periphery and foreigner-native are no longer valid” into subcategories of fictions of migration – “the multicultural novel informed by pluralistic ethnocentrism and the transcultural novel informed by cosmopolitan universalism” (11). Frank argues that when Said spoke of migration literature, he primarily focused on authorial biography and aspires for a migration literature that would be based on intratextual concerns and not on mere authorial background. If that is not the case, he posits the question as to whether any literature written by a migrant should be considered migration literature if it is uninformed by the experience of migration. For this dissertation, I have settled for the golden mean – the authors of the selected texts are definitely migrants but the texts

chosen explicitly deals with the experience of migration, although more in content than form as Frank would have desired.

Sten Pultz Moslund focuses on the “trancultural-hybrid novel” as defined by Sommer. From among the many classifications that Sommer identifies in his *Fictions of Migration*, this is the only category that explicitly deals with the issue of hybridity. According to Sommer, hybridity may not come to play any role in other variations of the migration novel like the “multicultural Bildungsroman”, “historical revisionist novel”, or the “migration novel” that deals with diasporic experiences (4-5). This dissertation though consciously chooses to examine hybridity in the subcategory of Sommer’s “migration novel” – novels that deal with the diasporic experiences as opposed to the transcultural-hybrid novel that deals with hybridity in a more explicit manner. This is because I intend to not just study hybridity but also mobility through the lens of socio-cultural theories. Unlike Moslund who goes beyond Bhabha and reaches to Deleuze and Bakhtin, I have deliberately tried to pursue a hybridity that is experienced in the course of day to day living. Moslund argues that the representation of hybridity “is often infected by hyperbolic tendencies which causes the creation of new centralisations of meaning as well as politicised and hierarchising dualisms ... between the rootless and the rooted, the migratory and the sedentary, stillness and movement, hybridity and purity, heteroglossia and monoglossia” (11).

Echoing Nikolas Kompridis, when he talked about the normativization of hybridity and the tendency to present hybridity as “a difference-erasing concept, negating the foreignness of the foreigner, the otherness of the other” (Kompridis 2005), Moslund too approaches hybridity as a normative, dominant language. Kompridis contends that multicultural democracies often exploits the concept of hybridity to neutralise the claims of culture by making a people choose between rights as citizens and their culture (322).

c) The third category relates to **critical works on American migration literature**: Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (1993), Patti Duncan (2004), A. Robert Lee (2008), Youngsuk Chae (2008), among others. Lee examines how a writer of Chinese heritage may choose not to be mainly defined by China when living in a culture whose own terms of reference not just interrogate but pass beyond “minority” and “mainstream”. Duncan proposes some new ways of considering Asian-American gender politics, feminism, and issues of immigration and language.

Sau-ling Cynthia Wong talks about the constructedness of the Asian American identity and how it affects the field of Asian American literature. She details how the term has always been a political compromise while negotiating with the state, as manifest by the changing ways of defining Asian Americans in the United States census. At various times, the different subgroups that make up “Asian American” have come together to protect their separate interests. But since the very beginning of the Asian American Movement, it was clear that the Asian American identity is a coalition at best. Since the first anthology of Asian American writers that limited itself to Chinese, Japanese and Filipino men (*Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writer* 1974), Asian American literature has grown to include writers of Korean, Indian, Vietnamese origin. Wong however draws attention to the academic demand that necessitates the continuance of Asian American literature as a body of work.

Just as the Asian American ethnic group is a political coalition, Asian American literature may be thought of as an emergent and evolving textual coalition, whose interests it is the business of a professional coalition of Asian American critics to promote. (9)

Wong maintains that a profitable reading of Asian American literature demands more attention to historical contextualization than in “Western ‘mainstream’ literature” because here the “depoliticization of the double is less fully veiled” (114-15). A race-aware comparative framework is very much required to understand the racial shadow that works in Asian American literature.

Chapter Plan

The dissertation consists of five chapters apart from the Introduction and Conclusion.

Chapter One: “Reading Migration Politics/Dynamics” examines the various theories of migration as well as its presentation in literature put forward by Frank, Moslund, Sommer and others, including the politics of migration and its effects on the host and settler communities. It draws upon the theories of critics like Bhabha, Said and Massey, to show how migrants try to establish a third or in-between space. It shows how the migrant tries to locate himself in the new land even as he carries memories of home and his native culture. As such his identity remains hyphenated or emerges as a

hyphenation—Asian American, Chinese American, Indian American for example—through conscious choice.

Chapter Two, titled “Negotiating Displacement, Challenging Boundaries” examines the problems of physical, social and emotional displacement and adjustment faced by the migrant/diasporic communities, along with their attempts at ‘belonging’. It examines how the texts deal with problems of memory and nostalgia on the settlers’ part while fighting the tendency to construct unidimensional ‘departures’ and ‘arrivals’. This chapter examines how the experience of displacement is presented in contemporary immigrant fiction. It examines the consequences of displacement amongst the migrant settlers as reflected in Thrity Umrigar’s *If Today be Sweet* (2007), Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Chang-Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* (1995) and Gish Jen’s *World and Town* (2011). It attempts to explain how the experience of displacement leads to challenging and broadening the horizon of these people, in terms of space, opportunities and the norms that decide one’s position in a hierarchy of power.

Chapter Three, titled “Workplace Dynamics: Race, Gender and Social Profiling” examines the work situation and the racial or gendered profiling therein—how migrants are pushed to taking up certain jobs and denied certain others—irrespective of existing credentials. Through the novels taken up, the chapter deliberates upon the nature of work open to immigrants of different “ethnicities” as also on the role that gender plays on the assignment of work. This chapter focuses on the workplace experiences from Indian American, Pakistani American, Chinese American and Korean American perspectives. It shows the unwarranted suspicion and discrimination faced by people of Asian-American origin simply because of contemporary political developments or even the memory of past events with which the individuals concerned are in no way involved. The selected texts are *If Today be Sweet* (Thrity Umrigar 2007), *Welcome to Americastan* (Jabeen Akhtar 2011), *The Partner Track* (Helen Wan 2013), *Free Food for Millionaires* (Min Jin Lee 2008) and *Native Speaker* (Chang-Rae Lee 1995).

Chapter Four, titled “For a New Topopoeia: Rejecting/Re-establishing Sense of Place” deals with the contradictory impulses of attachment to a place (sense of rootedness) and looking for a better place/places with or without homogenized corridors. Recent literature seems to negate the idea of the homogenized corridors, those grounds that were for long considered the launching pad for a newly arrived immigrant from the home

country. The three selected novels with their background settings prove an interesting contrast to each other and help bring out the differences among three very different places. The chosen novels are *Desirable Daughters* (2003) by Bharati Mukherjee which unfolds on the backdrop of San Francisco, *World and Town* (2011) by Gish Jen that is set in a New England state, exact location undetermined, and *The Interpreter* (2003) by Suki Kim where New York is the background on which the narrative plays out.

Chapter Five, titled “Reconstituting Community, Reclaiming Identity” examines the intricacies and problematics of identity formation in migrant/diasporic communities: how identity is never a stable given and is always in a process of becoming, especially in these communities with multicultural affiliations. The chapter examines the complexities of identity formation as revealed in literatures of migration in three immigrant communities – Indian American, Chinese American and Korean American. It contends that the concept of identity is intrinsically connected to the idea of community. This chapter considers the changing role of community in contemporary immigrant fiction and what it means for the individual living within such communities. It comments on the ever changing dynamics between the two while trying to reach an understanding about the way the significance of community evolves with succeeding generations. The texts included in this chapter are *Bone* (1993) by Fae Myenne Ng, *The Interpreter* (2003) by Suki Kim and *The Sleepwalker’s Guide to Dancing* (2014) by Mira Jacob.

This project looks at mutant hyphenations and hybridities in literary texts as a response to radical changes in migrant-settler consciousnesses. To the extent that literary cultural texts carry extremely private moments of fear and fantasy as well as socio-cultural realities to the public sphere, this thesis seeks to raise inter-disciplinary concerns on why and how, and where, human beings move and how they understand or negotiate narratives of mobility. This thesis addresses the question of mobility, central to the very concept of America, in the context of Asian Americans in American literature.