Gender in Diaspora:
A Case Study of Women Characters in M.G. Vassanji's Short Story Collections – *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis, Raja* (2006)

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

Master of Philosophy

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation ***"Gender in Diaspora: A Case Study of Women Characters in M.G. Vassanji's Short Story Collections – Uhuru Street (1992) and Elvis, Raja (2006)"*** submitted by Ms. B.R. Alamelu, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled ***"Gender in Diaspora: A Case Study of Women Characters in M.G. Vassanji's Sort Story Collections – Uhuru Street (1992) and Elvis, Raja (2006)"*** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction

The Present title 'Gender In Diaspora: A Case Study Of Women Characters in M.G. Vassanji's Short Story Collections- *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis, Raja* (2006)' is a study of the implicit Gender formation in Diaspora. The main objective of the dissertation is to bring out the trials and tribulations of Indian diasporic women settled in East Africa and Canada, taking into account the two literary works of Moyez G. Vassanji - *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja.* In these two short story collections, Vassanji provides a practical view of the third world diasporic women, discussing substantially about their struggles, stereotypes, subjugations, oppressive patriarchical structures and discriminations in socio-politico-economic and cultural milieu. An attempt will be made to provide a theoretical explanation of an intrinsic relationship of "Gender and Diaspora", which is becoming increasingly prominent in understanding the cultural synthesis widely prevalent among the migrant communities. Gender and Diaspora being widely studied areas of research across all disciplines, any attempt that tries to incorporate them in a single stretch might face a definite danger of half completion. Culture, being another richly researched area, might pose more difficulties when attempted to evaluate it in the light of Gender and Diaspora. Given these limitations, the present study will be restricted to making a brief exploration of cultural experiences of the South Asian diasporic women in general and the Indian diasporic women in particular, the focal point of Vassanji's two short story collections under debate.

M. G. Vassanji, an African-Indian-Canadian,[1] an internationally acclaimed writer, was born in racially stratified, colonial Kenya in the year 1950 to the parents of South Asian leniage belonging to a minority Islamic sect of Khoja Ismaili. His family migrated to Tanzania, the then Tanganyika in 1959, where Vassanji continued his schooling. Later in 1968, he joined the University College at Nairobi (which has subsequently become the University of Nairobi). He then moved to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States in 1969 for his higher education. Giving up his career as a nuclear physicist in 1978, Vassanji has settled down in multicultural Canada as a full-time writer, textually representing the Asian community – the grey area in East Africa and ethnic minorities in Canada. Lauding his literary commitment,

Dr. M.F. Salat[2] writes, "... So great was his inner urge to take upon himself the task of being the transmitter and preserver of his cultural inheritance that he gave up a promising career as a nuclear physicist and took to being a full time writer..."[3]

Vassanji, the author of six novels - *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *No New Land* (1991), *The Book of Secrets* (1994), *Amriika* (1999), *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) and *The Assassin's Song* (2007) and two short story collections- *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja* uncovers the mystery in Asian Africans and Asian African Canadians' lives by recording their unrecorded history of migration, their concept of homeland memory, hardships in the diasporia,[4] problems in their assimilation and racial and ethnic discrimination. There is a continuity through his novels and stories. This is more evident in the similarity of the characters such as: Mzee Pipa, Alzira, Ali, Kulsum, Roshan Mattress, Idi, Amin, and the background locations of Amin mansion, Boy's School, African Mnada, depicted in his first short story collection *Uhuru Street.* These events also revolve around the same characters and locations in his first well-known novel *The Gunny Sack. Uhuru Street* appears almost like a recreation of Kichvele Street in the novel *The Gunny Sack.* The stories 'The Expected One' and 'Dear Khatija' in his second short story collection *Elvis, Raja* are also set in India like that of his latest novel *The Assassin's Song*, hinting clearly that his second short story collection and the latest novel could have also been written simultaneously. But unlike *Uhuru Street*, which was published after his two novels - *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*, *Elvis, Raja* was published prior to *The Assassin's Song*.

Of his six novels so far, *The Gunny Sack* and *The Book of Secrets* are set in East Africa, and they both narrate the history of Indian immigrants there.

Spanning four generations of his family history, *The Gunny Sack* depicts the life of Dhandji Govindji. It opens with the plight of Dhanji Govindji's arrival in Zanzibar from Porbander, India about a century ago. The central theme in the story is told by Salim Juma, a descendant of Dhanji Govindji, and he is bequeathed a gunny sack by his grand aunt, Ji Bhai. This novel unravels a gallery of characters, whose unwritten stories reflect the Asian experience in East Africa over four generations. It can serve as a repository for the collective memory and an oral history of many Asian Africans. With The rise of African nationalism and the politically motivated racial

apartheid in the name of independence for Tanzania, many Asian Africans left the country in search of new homes in England, United States of America and Canada. In fact, the end of this novel eventually becomes the beginning for Vassanji's second novel *No New Land.*

His second novel, *No New Land,* set in Toronto, talks about the East Africans of Asian descent and their encounter with whites in Canada. Nurdin Lalani and his family, the expatriots from East Africa, are the central focus of the novel, through whom Vassanji portrays his story. Due to the subtle racial prejudices in the new society, Nurdin and Zera face hurdles in getting reasonable employment. It the main episode of the novel, Nurdin gets trapped in the trumped up rape charges brought against him by a white girl. However, Jamal, an immigrant lawyer, extricates Nurdin from the trouble, which eventually leads to his success in the diasporia.

The Book of Secrets is a story about a stolen diary of Alfred Corbin, a British Governor of a small fictitious town Kikono on the borderland between Tanzania and Kenya. Entries into the diary commence at the dawn of the twentieth century as British imperialism was sinking its roots in East Africa. A captivating story of a young Asian African Nurmohamed Pipa and his mysterious wife Mariamu was woven around the diary, as the forces of world history of the First World War and the African nationalism were breaking down. This novel provides a complete understanding of Asian African experience with vivid description of their history in East Africa from 1913 to 1988.

As the title suggests, another novel by Vassanji, *Amriika,* is set in America. The protagonist of the novel, Ramji, an East African of Asian descent, arrives in United States of America and finds it different from the one he dreamt about when he was at Dar es Salaam. Vassanji appears to be vividly capturing the mood of late 1960s in the U.S.A., with its turmoil of ideas, lifestyles, radical student movements, religious cults and revolutionary activities, thereby exploring the sense of exile, longing for identity and displacement.

The In-Between World of Vikram Lall is set largely in East Africa, and a part of it in London and Toronto, thereby occupying the "in-between" space of third and

first worlds. It is a story of trials and tribulations of African colonial administrators and their changing allegiances. Exposed to the violence of the end-of-colonial Empire as a boy, Vikram Lall, a Kenyan Asian (Indian origin), was later inducted into the corrupt post-independence politics by the time he became an adult. The novel also depicts the story of Deepa and Njoroge's unfulfilled love affair due to their racial difference. In the end, Vikram goes into exile to Ontario, where from he narrates his story. Therefore, Vikram Lall's recollection of childhood memory of the third world amidst his first world life experience denotes the "In-Between Worlds" that the Asian Africans occupy.

Vassanji's recent most novel, *The Assassin's Song,* is set in Gujarat, India, a province known for the 2002 riots. The novel depicts the story of Karsan Dargawalla, whose family descendants have been the keepers of a shrine devoted to a Sufi mystic belonging to the medieval times. They always believed that the eldest in the family is the avatar of the God on earth. When it was time for Karsan to take the charge of the shrine, it was 1960s, rational thinking overpowered him, and Karsan moved to Canada for his higher education. Settling down as a Professor in Canada, Karsan married Marge Thomson, a second generation Indian. A long time after his having left India, he comes back to Gujarat in 2002 only to find the shrine dismantled and the village ravaged, both of which had carried a lot of significance for his family since the time of his ancestors.

The "in-between" space found in the novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is also evident in the short story collections *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja* as the stories in the collections are set in different continents like Asia, Africa and North America. Although there is more than a decades' gap in the publication of Vassanji's two short story collections, nevertheless, there is a continuity between the both. These concisely constructed and elegantly woven short stories[5] evoke the images of day-to-day lives of East Africans of Indian descent in the diasporia. Talking about third world experience in the diasporia, Vassanji observes in an interview, "we come from a dense social background. As youth we are surrounded by people: large families, small communities. There are so many characters we observe that we can't fit in our heads, so they overflow in to stories"[6]. From his enormous experience and his ability to put it in a convincing way, Vassanji's short stories acquire their significance.

Vassanji has made use of the short story genre to depict those characters, which couldn't be readily fitted into the thematic purview of his novels.

The twenty-eight short stories of his two collections portray various individual characters fictionally built around the Khoja Ismaili community. Multifarious themes of race, religion, class and gender find their distinct depiction in these two short story collections.

Vasssanji's novels have been widely researched both in terms of their themes and style. However, what can be derived out of the research done so far is the recognition of inadequate attention paid to one of the richly narrated themes in Vassanji's writings i.e. Gender and its role in Diaspora. The present research is a small attempt intended just to make a beginning for filling up such an inadequacy.

In order to obtain maximum clarity, this study will focus specifically on the place and role of gender in the lives of third world diasporic women[7] depicted in Vassanji's two short story collections – *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis, Raja* (2006). As these two short story collections clearly depict, the third world diasporic women face double alienation and imposed acculturation in their day-to-day diasporic lives, which Vassanji so beautifully captures and records significantly in these stories. Despite an overarching presence of diasporic women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Himani Bannerji, Suniti Namjoshi, Uma Parameswaran, Nazneen Sadiq, Surjit Kalsey and others, the choice of Vassanji's literary genre to examine the issue under debate has a special significance. In the first place, picking up the gender from a general cultural narration would be more challenging than reanalyzing a gendered perspective which has already been presented in a particular fashion. In the case of former, where gender has to be discovered among existing themes, there lies a scope for the development of new approaches that may prove useful in further research. But in the later case, where a particular aspect is presented keeping gender in mind, the researcher has to either completely contradict the existing theoretical formulation, thereby joining the club of opponents or strenghthen the existing formulation, thereby providing additional base for support. Under these circumstances, Vassanji's two short story collections provide an ample opportunity to come up with new approaches in diasporic gender studies. In the second place, a male narration of female gender,

which is a rare literary practice, is likely to provide more significant insights than female narration of her own gender, which remains quite common.

In the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a pioneer in the third world feminism,

> I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our every day lives... The last century was clearly the century of the maturing of feminist ideas, sensibilities and movements. The twentieth century was also the century of the decolonization of the third world/south, the rise and splintering of the communist second world, the triumphal rise and recolonisation of almost the entire globe by capitalism, and of the consolidation of ethnic, nationalist, religious fundamentalist movements and nation –states. Thus, feminist ideas and movements may have grown and matured, the backlash and challenges to Feminism have also grown exponentially (Mohanty 2-3).

The sudden backlash in the mainstream feminist thought, which Mohanty so firmly discusses about, paved a way for multiple feminisms designed to address multiple ideological issues. Such feminist theorists as Kumari Jaya Wardena, Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, Isabel Letelier and Achola Pala have theorized the specific place of Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African women in their national struggles for liberation, and in the economic development and democratization of previously colonized countries. More recently, works of women feminist theorists like Ella Shohat, Angela Davis, Jacqui Alexander, Linda Alcoff, Lisa Lowe, Avtar Brah, bell hooks, Zillah Eisenstein, Himani bannerji, Patricia Bell Scott, Vandana Shiva, Kumkum Sangari, Ruth Frankenberg, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Kimberle Crenshaw, Elizabeth Minnich, Leslie Roman, Lata Mani, Uma Narayan, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Leila Ahmed and others have charted out a new ground for the theorization of feminism and racism, immigration, eurocentrism, critical white studies, heterosexism and imperialism.

As it is clearly evident, the theoretical contestations and gender-based issues widely focused by the above mentioned feminist scholars have been particularly explicit both in their content and outlook. Their concentration is outwardly political. An explicit approach to explaining gender equality adopted by these feminists is undoubtedly crucial; it cannot hold water unless it can pay an equal attention to the implicit gender-based cultural impositions on women in general and diasporic women in particular. It is the later area of research, with which the present study is concerned. Such an implicit approach to gender equality in diaspora becomes crucial for providing an equal social recognition to the third world diasporic women in their host lands, to create a conducive atmosphere for them to freely express their everyday problems, to facilitate them to have a collective action necessary for overall social cohesion, and to enable them to react and resist against any oppressive social value detrimental to their free lives.

Interestingly enough, the substantive material needed to start a meaningful dialogue on the problem under consideration is more abundant in such literary writings as novels, short stories, biographies, lifestyle literary commentaries and descriptive opinion pieces than in social science research papers, psycho-social analyses, judicial pronouncements, administrative formulations and planning reports. It is with such a conviction that the present research will explore the two well known short story collections by M.G. Vassanji, who is known for his extensive writings on such diverse aspects of life as immigration patterns, life of diasporic peoples in a new land, homeland cultural baggages, observation of new social practices, retention of homeland cultures, multiple identities and most importantly, gender roles in diasporic life.

The next chapter, second in the chronology of the present study, provides a brief outlay of the theoretical framework of both the discourses- gender and diaspora. It will further explore a possibility for the emergence of a new discourse of Diasporic Feminism (DF) to voice out the subjugation and oppressive social structures detrimental to the third world diasporic women in the larger framework of culture. Accordingly, this chapter will also conceptualize three types of identities- projected, perceived and real identities, experienced by the third world diasporic women. It also

encapsulates the fragmented consciousness often faced by the third world diasporic women.

In addition, it will discuss the emergence of feminism within diaspora, hypothesizing a possibility for Diasporic Feminism. In this endeavour, instead of going by simple propositions and making speculative predictions, the second chapter will try to present a rational evaluation of the proposition that there is really be a need for the emergence of a new discourse to study the lives of a particular set of people i.e, third world diasporic women.

The third chapter in series will give a brief historical account of Asian migrants in general and Indian migrants in particular, who migrated to East African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. There will be a brief discussion in the chapter on three types of East African literatures - Caucasoid, Negroid and Asiatic writings. The analysis of the chapter will be based on Vassanji's first short story collection, *Uhuru Street.* The sixteen stories in the collection will thoroughly be explored for the themes of marriage, death, sexuality, religion, race, class and gender. The chapter will explore further the socio-economic-political milieu of pre-colonial and neocolonial Tanzania. In brief, the third chapter will provide the migrant history of Asian/Indian diasporic women residing in *Uhuru Street* in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The fourth chapter will present a complex social picture of multiple homes and homelessness. Talking about his own experience of identity, Vassanji observes, "In my heart I am still very much an African, but I have lived in Canada for a long time and it feels like home. At some point in your life you realize that there are several homes."[8] The fourth chapter will depict almost a similar identity crisis faced by Asian African Canadians, which Vassanji himself appears to have undergone in his real life.

It must be noted that since the primary source, short story collection of the fourth chapter *Elvis, Raja* focuses equally on the pain and pleasure of the third world diasporic women, this chapter is contextually titled as 'Thinking Back Home' instead of Nostalgia. While Nostalgia refers only to happy memory, the thought about home occurs at both the levels of pain and pleasure. The twelve short stories in the

collection provide an overview of the day-to-day lives of third world diasporic women in Canada. The chapter will also offer a political account of indegenisation/Africanisation movements in East African nations – Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda – which ultimately pushed the Asians in East Africa towards the first world as refugees, exiles and expatriots.

Finally, the concluding chapter will present a comparative analysis of both *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja*. An evaluation of the lives of the third world diasporic women first at Uhuru Street and then in Toronto will be undertaken in order to derive an average strategy of the third world diasporic women's lives. However, it increasingly appears that the third world diasporic women are under a constant pressure, especially due to expanding transnationalism and global culture.

In nutshell, the concluding chapter will sum up the entire study and provide comprehensive analysis to support the hypothesis of the study, thereby exploring double alienation, self-based acculturation and subjugation of third world diasporic women as depicted in Vassanji's two short story collections – *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis, Raja* (2006).

End Notes

[1] "African-Indian-Canadian": Since he was born in Kenya which is a part of East Africa and brought up in Tanzania and settled in Canada, it is appropriate to keep in mind his birth place and where he grew up in the beginning. <http://www.wikipedia.org/search> accessed on 20 Nov, 2007.
[2] "M.F. Salat": He is a Reader in the Department of Canadian Studies at the M.S. University of Baroda. <http://www.msubaroda.ac.in/googlesearch> accessed on 25 Jun, 2008.
[3] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[4] "Diasporia": this word which means the host land or the new land will be used through out this dissertation. As the term diaspora encompasses four terms- migration, expatriation, refuge and exile, the term diasporia supplements the meaning of two words- host land and new land, used for the alien land where the immigrants settle.
[5] "Twenty-eight short stories": *Uhuru Street* contains sixteen short stories and *Elvis, Raja* contains twelve short stories which in total becomes twenty-eight short stories.
[6] Deonandan, Ray. 'Canada's literary Golden Boy' Int. with M. G. Vassanji, *India Currents Magazine.* Mar, (1995).
[7] "third world diasporic women": the word third world refers to Asians in general and Indians in particular and third world diasporic women refers to the Asian/Indian women who migrated to East Africa and also those who migrated from third world countries like East Africa and Asia to the first world i.e, Canada.
[8] This is taken from an interview with Vassanji by Ray Deonandan. Deonandan, Ray. 'Canada's Literary Golden Boy' Int. with M. G. Vassanji, *India Currents Magazine.* Aug, (2002).

Chapter II

Gender in Diaspora: A Theoretical Introduction

Gender in Diaspora: A Theoretical Introduction

The US and the USSR are the most
powerful countries
in the world
but only 1/8 of the world's population.
African people are also 1/8 of the world's
population.
of that, 1/4 is Nigerian.
1/2 of that world's population is Asian.
1/2 of that is Chinese.
There are 22 nations in the Middle East.
Most people in the world are yellow, black, brown, poor, female,
non-
Christian
and do not speak English. By the year 2000 the 20 largest cities
in the world
will have one thing in common
none of them will be in Europe, none in the United States.
(Mohanty 43)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a pioneer in the field of third world feminism, begins her essay, 'Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and The Politics of Feminism'[1] with the above mentioned poem by Audre Lorde [2] to point out the institutional power structures that define and circumscribe the lives of third world women. Undoubtedly, Lorde's words provide a poetic cartography of the historical and political location of third world people in general and third world women in particular. This poem also suggests with precise force and poignancy, the contours of the present world, A world that can be definable only in relational terms; a world that can be understood only in its destructive divisions of gender, colour, class, sexuality and

nationality. But it should not be forgotten that this world also has had powerful histories of resistance and revolutions when time demanded. It is these contours that define the complex ground for the emergence and consolidation of Diasporic Feminism.

Diasporic Feminism (DF), as the term suggests is a combination of two different discourses- Diaspora and Feminism. But this is only a linguistic combination. It neither rejects nor encompasses fully either Diasporic or Feministic theories. Instead, DF largely focuses on the day-to-day lives of diasporic women. But the diasporic life itself is not so easy to be defined and approached. Diasporic community is not a uniform group. Space, time and location play decisive role in shaping and reshaping different diasporic communities. For instance, the third world diasporic communities living in the third world are different from the third world diasporic communities living in the first world. There exist homeland and new land distinctions. But the impending question would be: how far these distinctions are relevant when talking about the same gender, i.e., women. Can gender surpass all these distinctions? In Mohanty's observation, all women across classes and cultures somehow socially constitute a homogenous group. What binds women as a homogenous group is the sociological sameness of their oppression.[3] However, gender itself is not a single entity. It is pluralistic by nature. It is under such complex circumstances, DF provides space to read Diaspora from the standpoint of gender.

Although the concept of Diaspora appears to be liberating, its actual practice is painful, especially for woman. There is a visible gender inequality among the third world diasporic communities. The third world women are subjected to the same cultural oppression and social subjugation both at homeland and abroad. As a consequence, with shattered hopes of new life, these women find their diasporic life to be in no way different from that of their homeland. Although the diasporic feminism may not be able to effectively address each and every problem a third world diasporic woman faces in her day-to-day life, it undeniably explores the tension in retaining the homeland culture in an alien land,[4] diasporic tension of carrying the cultural baggage, problems of assimilation into the new land culture, patriarchical notions of aspiration and preference for a male

child, domestic violence, housewife mindset, act of mothering, superstitious beliefs carried in the name of culture, oppressive traditions, religious fanaticism, poverty, social customs, oral tradition, myths and legends, sayings and proverbs, struggles of widowed mothers, the tension between the first and the second generation women in understanding their homeland and host land cultures, erosion of mother tongue, fractured identities acquired in the new land, fragmented consciousness, and so on. However, given the limited scope and time, The present dissertation addresses the problems of only two main types of diasporic women - third world women in third world and third world women in the first world, keeping Moyez G. Vassanji's two short story collections - *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *Elvis Raja* (2006) as primary sources. It should also be kept in mind that the term "third world" used here refers to the designation of geographical location and socio-historical conjunctures. There arises an obvious question as to why is there a need to venture into a new course of diasporic feminism as the third world women have already been trying to address their concerns under the third world feminist theoretical disguise. There seems to be a need for such a distinction because firstly, putting third world women in one single entity is ludicrous as the discourse of Feminism itself is a continually contested field. Moreover, the third world feminism faces a tremendous pressure today in addressing the day-to-day troubles of the third world women. Another significant reason for the emergence of diasporic feminism is that the struggles a third world woman faces at her homeland are different from her counterpart in diaspora. For instance, an Indian or an Asian Woman may not face racial or ethnic discrimination in her homeland, whereas third world diasporic women- living outside their homelands would be definitely stereotyped and subjected to racial and ethnic discrimination in the name of migration either for survival or taken by force as an indentured labourer or as an exile or as an expatriate or as a refugee from her homeland. The role of gender discrimination in third world diasporic women's lives is definitely higher than that of third world women at homeland, probably because of their pattern of migration, status and condition of living in the diasporia. Salman Rushdie, in his book *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) gives his account of horrible conditions and state of living of third world diasporic women

> There are plenty of horror stories, if you want them. One mother told us how her baby died of infections contracted because they were living in a room into which sewage kept pouring. Another told us she had been stuck in a B&B for three years now. Two pregnant mothers past their due dates, have been sleeping on the council chamber floor for over a week, thinking it preferable to, and safer than, their appalling homes. And, over and over again, I was told of staircases with rotten floorboards, of toilets that did not flush, of damp and mould, and of infestation by insects. In their single room at 42 Gloucester Place, Mr. and Mrs. Ali and their son are obliged to share their quarters with large numbers of 'whitish, crawling insects like earthworms'. (Rushdie 140).

In another instance, M. G. Vassanji in his novel *No New Land*[5] (1991) also describes the diasporic situation of a doubly displaced Indian woman Zera (the protagonist Nurdin Lalani's wife) and her struggle for survival in the New Land, Canada.

> Zera began to have trouble with jobs, which did not help matters. The job she had taken early on was as receptionist to a Chinese doctor. A perfect job, walking distance away, in the mall. She could do shopping during lunch time. And after school the kids could play outside the office under her watchful eyes. But then, after a few months, she had been dismissed. "You're English," the doctor had said vaguely. A "Canadian" was duly installed. "I brought so many patients," she said. Which she had, ... (Vassanji 1991 66).

This is an instance of a third world woman being rejected for work by a third world professional living in the first world.

The previous instance depicted by Rushdie ironically shows the lack of basic facilities in the diasporia which an immigrant expects to be better than his/her homeland. Such socio-political-economic and cultural issues, especially concerned with the third

world diasporic women need a special attention, and the diasporic feminism would be a proper medium for that. By this, However, It should not be presumed that diasporic feminism is the only homogenous theoretical configuration to address third world diasporic women's struggles. The merits and demerits, possibilities and limitations of diasporic feminism are understood through the exploration of implicit Gender formation in Diaspora. Thus, this chapter tries to provide a theoretical analysis of 'Gender in Diaspora', keeping in mind East Africa and Canada as the diasporia for the Indians in particular and Asians in general.

Vassanji, an Indo-African-Canadian[6] novelist of acclaim, a short story writer and a Giller Prize winner, provides a cartography of these third world diasporic women in his twenty-eight short stories[7] spread in two collections. "Gender and Diaspora" have been widely discussed, and are increasingly becoming important theoretical assertions in literary quarters. Any discussion of "Gender" and "Diaspora", the two distinctly different discourses under a combined rubric, might involve a danger of neglecting the minuet but prominent misplacement of phraseology. One such mishap may occur if a clear line of difference on the Connotation between "Gender and Diaspora" and "Gender in Diaspora" is not drawn. To put it more aptly, when speaking about "Gender and Diaspora," it is implied that an attempt is being made for an exploratory investigation of identical aspects between the two discourses of gender and diaspora. Such an investigation is very general, and deals with both the explicit and implicit relationship between Gender and Diaspora and vice-versa. However, when the phrase "Gender in Diaspora" is cautiously employed, the focus is implicit, dealing particularly with operation of gender in diasporic communities. The title of the present chapter fits exactly here. To put it more precisely, what one is interested to do in the current exercise is to examine the whole question of gender as part of diasporic life conveniently found in the contemporary writings. This is precisely why an implicit distinction between the connotations of "Gender and Diaspora" and "Gender in Diaspora" has to be made so carefully. Unfortunately enough, no feminist theory appears to have paid sufficient attention to the discussion of Gender roles among diasporic communities, especially the Asian immigrant communities. The feminist

theories, of course, had altogether a different set of principles as their foundational basis at the outset of their evolution.

The term 'Feminism' as mentioned earlier, is a widely contested field. Feminism emerged as a movement in 1960s, and the significance of the institutionalized power structures like race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, wellness, age, etc was felt in the academia. As an emerging discourse ready to address these untouched issues till then, the feminist theoretical framework quickly gained a momentum across disciplines, and was accepted as an active protest. Initially, Feminist theorists like Elaine Showalter classified feminist discourse in the West into three main stages: The first wave in the series is presumed to have begun in the mid 1800s, tracing back to the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, 1848. With the passing of suffrage bill in 1920, the first wave of feminism almost came to an end. The second wave of feminism regained its momentum with the appointment of the President's Commission by J.F. Kennedy on the status of women in 1961. The Equal Pay Act of 1963, Betty Freidan's publication of *Feminine Mystique* (1963), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the establishment of the first National Organisation for Women in the United States in 1966 and the first National Women's Political Conference held in 1971 were some of the milestones in the second wave of feminist discourse. It was widely believed at that time that both the second and the third waves of feminism were going hand-in-hand simultaneously in the same period. But there were obvious differences visible in the operation of both the stages. While the Second wave of women's movement was well-planned, aptly defined and implemented by white middle-class women, the third wave was short of such a concerted effort. Obvious enough is the fact that the project of second wave of feminist movement excluded a large junk of middle-class non-white women, failing to accommodate the class, race and ethnic differences among the same gender. The policy of exclusion adopted during this stage invited a widespread criticism from different quarters. In fact, these shortcomings of the movement increased the importance of third wave feminist discourse. The feminist discourse re-invented itself during the third wave of feminist movement, allowing free space for all kinds of women to address their struggles in a manner appropriate in their context. Such a flexibility, in turn, gave birth to multiple

feminist thoughts and protest forms to operate under the disguise of mainstream feminist discourse. Within four decades, the subject matter has become so complex and contesting, leading to more than a half-a-dozen feminist theories. These divergent branches of thought/feminist theories most often touched a vast array of issues which did not figure in the mainstream feminism. Socialist feminism, Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Postcolonial feminism, Postmodern feminism, Constructive feminism and Black feminism are only few dominant ones to name. Sometimes, each feminist Ideology may have multiple identities, leading to paradigm of inter-disciplinarity. Eco-feminism, Techno-Feminism, Academic feminism, Cyber-Feminism, for instance, are the plural forms of dominant feminist ideologies. Even the names of nations or the continents are being appended to the discourse of feminism to address the issues pertaining to those countries. Asian Feminism, Canadian Feminism, Indian Feminism, Caribbean Feminism, Russian Feminism and Japanese Feminism are some to name. Third World Feminism also falls in this category.

Each feminist theory is a response to existing forms of social oppression and subjugation of women. While each human-society differs from the other, its oppressive structures also differ, requiring a different rhetoric response. Each particular feminist discourse, therefore, if understood contextually, is a particular response to a particular social situation. For instance, EcoFeminism marks the distinctive connection between nature and woman, Cyber Feminism explores the gender roles in the cyber space, Canadian Feminism, Indian Feminism, Caribbean Feminism, etc investigate the struggles, stereotypes, subordination and discriminations of women in those respective nations.

Diaspora studies, like Feminism, is also a recent phenomenon which emerged as a discourse in early nineties. Diaspora is an umbrella term which includes exile, expatriation, refuge and migration. Ever since the discovery of new lands by sea voyages in the fourteenth century and the subsequent advancement of technology, human migration has remained as an immense endeavour and increasingly, a phenomena related to modern civilization. With the passage of time, this activity brought about revolutionary

changes that humanity had experienced never before. Colonisation of new territories by powerful nations, formation of Empires, creation of new lands, intermingling of nations, devastations on one side and advancements on the other side, all are the poignant results of the large scale activity of migration undertaken at various junctures for different purposes. Vijay Mishra and Uma Parameswaran have examined the Indian diaspora as two different historical phases in different contexts. While talking about Indian diaspora settled around the world, Mishra says,

> I speak of the Indian Diaspora which I would like to examine through two of its phases; an old 'pre-modern' phase marked by the movement of indentured labourers in the nineteenth century and a new late modern phase that has seen a massive migration of people of their own volition from the Indian subcontinent to the metropolitan centers of Europe, North America and Australia. (Mishra 35).

While Vijay Mishra's division pertains to pre-modern and modern phase, Parameswaran links migration with colonialism and talks about two waves with various phases according to the time periods and nature of migration involved. For her,

> To start from the common phase shared by most of the colonized countries, there were two distinct waves of emigration from South Asia. One took place during the British Raj and the other after independence from the British... The first wave was initiated in the later half of the nineteenth century by the British who needed to fill the gaps created by the abolition of slave trade. In search of cheap labourers, to work in the plantations of the Caribbean, South Africa, East Africa and Fiji their agents scoured the countryside the Indian subcontinent and rounded up thousands of indentured labourers who were shipped away... The second phase of this first wave consisted of traders who came out to provide basic cultural and business services to the earlier groups, and they made their living off their countrymen... The third phase took place after the age of indenture went out and it

> consisted of people with a higher level of education or business expertise....The second wave of emigration started in the early 1950s. Educated South Asians of newly independent countries set out to find their fortune in countries that were in need of technological brain power. (Parmeswaran in Jain 31-32).

Theoretically speaking, migration, seen as one of the basic demographic processes in company with fertility and mortality 'mobility' like birth and death, is a demographic universal and as such has been the subject of study over many years within a number of disciplines, including anthropology, geography, political economy, sociology and statistics. Migration can be analysed, based on such models as: Individualist perspectives, Structuralist perspectives, Social systems framework and Structuration annals.

According to the Individualist Model, migration is purely an act of one's own choice based on his/her rational of utility. Harris and Todaro are the main proponents of the Individualist theory of Migration.[8] In contrast, the structuralist group of theorists considers individual migrants as simple respondents to the social environment in which they live. Structuralist approach suggests that migration is a passive response to the economic, social and political environment which is beyond the control of individual migrants.[9] This view too did not receive much attention from the scholars. Any conception which views migration as the simple act of individual's response to social environment is bound to limit itself in both scope and content.

In the social systems model, Hoffmann-Nowtony adopts a completely different take on migration. According to him, migration occurs in a broader social framework as a response to tensions initiation within a system element (individual or subsystem). He lays emphasis on power and practice throughout his theory, considering former as the capacity to improve and maintain one's own position and later as the yard-stick with which the cultural legitimacy of the former can be measured. He also recognizes well the consequences that may arise when power and prestige are not balanced.[10] The social

systems model of migration, therefore, adopts a holistic approach completely different from both the individualist and structuralist models.

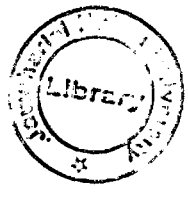
The Structuration Model of migration on the other hand, emphasises the Agent Structure relationship. This model closely resembles Anthony Gidden's recent concept of Structuration.[11] For Gidden, this self-awareness is not at the level of 'rationalization' but rather a process of continual monitoring of the effects, both intended and unintended, of action and the modification of behaviour accordingly.

Though migration is an age old phenomenon, it has acquired importance in the recent past as a result of the process of globalization let loose by the huge acceleration in the speed and the equally rapid decline in the cost of long distance communication during the last century. There has been a dramatic increase in the scale and character of transnational migration. Transnational migration is described as a pattern of migration in which persons move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, and continue to maintain social connections with the polity from which they originate. They live across international borders in transnational social fields. Take the Indian Diaspora in Canada, for instance. Considered as the land of opportunities, Canada welcomed Indians of various professions at various stages. According to Kavita A. Sharma, most of the Indians who went to Canada were Sikhs from Punjab. "The process started with Indians passing through Canada in 1897 to attend Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebrations" (Sharma 3) and

> again in 1902 some Indians from the crown colonies of Hong Kong, Singapore, Rangoon and Shanghai went to join the coronation celebrations of Edward VII, and passed through Victoria. After their return to Hong Kong those Indians who were basically part of the contingent of imperial army were disbanded. "This event initiated the first Indian migration to Canada as Indians who had transited through it had already perceived it to be a land of economic opportunities" (Sharma 3).

The process once started, continued despite various attempts like orders-in-council of 1910 which required each immigrant to pay a $200 as tax before being admitted and also the condition that he/she should have had a continuous passage from his/her homeland. All these attempts to stop the "brown peril", as the Canadian government dubbed Asian immigrants, culminated in the Komagatu Maru incident in which 376 passengers on board of the Japanese ship were quarantined off the coast of Vancouver harbour for two months and were refused entry into Canada. But all these racist attempts had only short-term impact, and the "ongoing journey" of Indians to Canada continued, and is likely to continue further.

Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Bash and Christina Blancszanton have defined transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-standard social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement."[12] Part of their important project seems to be to highlight national formation. They write "by living their lives across borders, transmigrants find themselves confronted with and engaged in the nation building processes of two or more nation-states."[13] If a migrant or transmigrant adopts the diasporia as second home, gradually he or she becomes 'Diaspora' of his/her home country. To any migrants, irrespective of their gender, the home country becomes an "imagined space"[14] according to Vassanji and "Imagined Homeland"[15] in the diasporia, according to Rushdie. The concepts of 'home' and 'homeland' are defined, discussed and debated time and again in the academic arena in general and Diaspora Studies in particular. For sociologists, geologists, anthropologists, political scientists, modern historians and most importantly for literary critics more recently, *Diaspora* has become a prominent field of investigation. The word 'Diaspora' is defined, at its simplest, as the dispersal of people from their original homeland.[16] When looked at from this perspective, in the twenty-first century, the utility of the concept extends to countless populations across the globe who are dispersed from their homelands.[17] The working definition of Diaspora, however, includes much more than what it does literally. Some scholarship has already made some advancement in this regard and tried to offer a comprehensive conceptual clarification on diaspora. According to one such opinion, which can more or less fit into the present day context, diaspora includes dispersal from



original homeland to two or more places, movement between the homeland and new host and; social, cultural or economic exchange between or among the diasporic communities.[18] William Safran has proposed a six-point model notion of diaspora with a view to giving it the maximum modern shape. According to him, dispersal from the original homeland, retention of collective memory, vision or myth of the original homeland, partial assimilation in host society, the idea of dislocation and relocation, idealized wish to return to original homeland, desirable commitment to restoration of homeland, retention of homeland culture and continually renewed linkages with homeland are the ideal types of Diaspora.[19] To put it simply, diaspora is literally a tussle between life and death to an immigrant especially for women. Jasbir Jain, in her essay, 'Transformational Strategies: Home and Abroad' writes,

> Gender becomes an important question in itself for the fact of dislocation affects men and women differently, primarily as choices are different or made on different grounds and also because female dress and role models are more deeply embedded in culture. Feminism is culture specific and women's lives are culturally constructed. The process of socialization is rooted in their social reality. (Jain 164)

There seems to be a deliberate emphasis on the word 'deeply' which lays a stress that "women's lives are culturally constructed" and so, there is no escape for women to come out of this imposed caricature. Therefore, it largely appears that diasporic situation is a space of dilemma. In this diasporic situation, men are perceived as negotiators with the external world and the women are looked upon as custodians of culture. There is a need for the diasporic feminism to make inroads in relieving women from the colonization of culture.

Diasporic space and literature remain culturally contested all the time. In Canadian diasporic writings, for instance, becoming Canadian is often stressed. In fact, such a stress is evident in most of the diasporic literatures. Indian women in Canada have to shed their saris to assimilate into the New Land culture. This is only a small living example, where women are required to compromise themselves in order to satisfy both

the norms of homeland cultures and diasporic procedures. Total assimilation of diasporic communities into the new cultures is almost an impossible task, which is a different question altogether. These are some of the diasporic cultural tensions, which all diasporic writers, including Vassanji, are striving to resolve. There appears to be a confessional recognition of their cultural baggages by immigrants in the new land. Quite interestingly, thrust for cultural continuity and homeland customs, traditions, social practices, religious affiliations and even kinship revival can increasingly be found among the second and third generation immigrant communities.

Culture reflects shared sentiments and beliefs. It can be imposed by one people on another. Culture, in fact, can mean anything. Different concepts of the term are embedded in various disciplinary traditions. For instance, Edward Burnet Tylor, a Social Anthropologist, defined culture in 1871 thus,

> Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.[20]

Linked to the social transformations of the last centuries, culture is both a product and a shaper of modernity, inordinately vague, yet crucial to the social sciences and humanities. Most recently, in the year 2002, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) described culture as,

> The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.[21]

One can find the retention of such value systems, ways of living together and practicing tradition and beliefs as a social group in the diasporic situation. Uma Parameswaran, an Indo-Canadian woman writer, places a woman migrant within this trope of preserving such rich cultures. According to her, "Perhaps Women, with centuries

of cultural indoctrinations and expectations are able to adapt more quickly and to accept and love two homes without conflict or ambivalence" (Parameswaran in Jain 167). Parameswaran appears to have forgotten the gender dimension fully. Her statement is a complete deviation from the ground reality. In the ground reality, diasporic women are subjected to conflicts and experiences markedly different from those of men. At the very outset, the element of choice in the fact of migration is limited in women's case. They often arrive in the diasporia as appendages of men: as wives, daughters or mothers. Acceptance in the culture of adoption often necessitates a change in dress code and life style attacking their sense of identity. Furthermore, the Indian diasporic woman caries with her the cultural and religious baggage where family and procreativity are valued over the self, where woman is venerated as Devi, the Goddess, and the young virgins are worshipped. A strict moral code defines her area of freedom. The separation between the public and the personal space is much more marked in woman's case than that of a man.

As has already been stated, culture always shapes society, and in return, is shaped by the same forces which otherwise it can shape. But what role does culture have in a discussion like this on a theoretical framework of gender in Diaspora? Apparently, culture runs as a yardstick with which gender and Diaspora are connected effectively. Although the thin line between gender and Diaspora woven by culture is left mostly unidentified, its bridging role of facilitation goes well beyond any recognition. In other words, it is the preservation and quest for sustainability of culture that compel gender and Diaspora to work closely. The impending need increasingly felt by Indian diasporic communities to get their sons married to Indian women, for instance, clearly speaks of the use of gender by diasporic communities abroad to retain and advance their homeland culture.

When both the discourses of Gender and Diaspora are combined together and applied to the specific investigation of the Gender roles in Diasporic communities in general and Indian diasporic communities in particular, a different spectrum of variables come to light. Such an exploratory investigation, when taken seriously, identifies three prominent dimensions of Gender Identity among diasporic communities---"Perceived

identity", "Projected identity" and "Real identity." An honest effort is made here to trace traits of Perceived identity and projected identity, and how these two lead to the erosion of Real Identity of Indian women among diasporic communities.

"My heart rejoices each time a woman emerges from a shadow" writes Mariamma Ba. In her Book *So long a letter.* The question arises who is this woman and where does she emerge from? Is there a real shadow in each woman's life? If so, is it so real that she can so easily come out of her shadow? These are the potent questions that are often posed when considering Gender. A woman from a third world is considered as emancipated, empowered and secular in her home land because she is one who emerged from the shadow and also is considered as one who rose above from the bottom level. But she who rose above and emerged from the shadow is again entering into the same shadow in a different mode. This shadow of hers projects an unreal image to the outside world. This outside world and shadow of image do have an entirely different connotation for Indian diasporic women. When women from the third world in general and India in particular, happen to disperse from their Homeland and settle in a new-land, their Homeland cultural traits come in their way of normal social assimilation and affiliation. Unfortunately, these cultural baggages are heavily loaded on the shoulders of women rather than on men. While men are left free on their choice to retain or to reject their original cultural practices, women on the other hand, are expected, rather imposedly, to carry with them these often repressive social customs. But no feminist theory/movement appears to have been deeply touched by the struggles faced by these diasporic women. The diasporic feminism is an appropriate discourse that can fill up this gap, and is well suited to exploring identity crisis and the imposed social norms on diasporic women in general and third world diasporic women in particular.

Indian diasporic women are either doubly displaced or compelled to accept the maximum imposition of perceived identities in the form of homeland cultures. As a consequence, the image of their shadow multiplies into new forms of Gender oriented social oppressions and cultural deprivations.

Firstly, the Diasporic women experience triple consciousness. Although the discourse of diasporic writings identifies only their double consciousness, the memory of homeland and the consciousness of new land, diasporic women in new land have to face the most blatant third type of consciousness, the consciousness of retaining homeland 'culture.' The third type of consciousness is fragmented by nature, giving space to call it as fragmented consciousness. The fragmented homeland cultural consciousness is a broken mirror in the diasporic literature, because it remains as an "imaginary" in one's imagination. The experience of triple consciousness imposed on women becomes serious to such an extent that on one hand, they would be unable to escape from others' perception about them, and on other hand, their lives in a new land will be half-recognised and less assimilative.

Secondly, due to the social constraints carried with them unintentionally and half-heartedly under no other accepted alternatives, women among the diasporic communities are deprived of certain economic benefits in the diasporia which have otherwise been possible. Working during the night hours, for instance, although much rewarding and in fact quite feasible for mothers of grown-up children, would not be possible for Indian diasporic women. These constraints are having an adverse effect on the economic freedom of these women, restricting their socio-personal aspirations intrinsically connected to financial resources. And most dramatically, given these economic constraints intrinsically related to socio-cultural traits of Homeland, the traditional notion of male as a "Bread winner" of the family is systematically kept alive even in the new land.

Thirdly, deviation of any kind from triple consciousness does perpetually have negative impact even on the individual prospects of second and third generation female members of Indian diasporic communities. Such negative effects might influence the marital choices, educational opportunities, employment accessibility and family support etc.

The way in which the whole incident is narrated in Vassanji's recent novel *The Assassin's Song* (2007) brings to light the real treatment being accorded even to second generation women among the Indian diasporic communities anywhere on the globe in general, and in Canada, often known as "Land of Opportunities", in particular. In a short story 'The Expected One'[22] Nagji, the second generation Canadian-Indian, is sent to India in search of an Indian bride for himself. There is a visible evidence of second generation man longing for an Indian born bride for a precise reason that the second generation Indian women in Canada, are deemed socially unfit and outside the family norms of the 'Indian type'. Although they themselves are born in Canada, these second generation men do not seem to accept the freedom being enjoyed by the second-generation third world women.

Both *The Assassin's Song* and 'The Expected One' reveal two striking complex realities with a similar tone of substance. In the first place, the women in a new land are surrounded by a web of perceptional identities often built exterior to their real identity. In the second place, it is the conformity of their perceptional identity to that of projected identity which determines the individual prospects of these third world diasporic women, including second generation third world women. Canada having one of the largest Indian diasporic communities testifies to the imposition of homeland oppressive cultural practices upon women. More than often, these cultural impositions are based on simplistic, rather irrational, factors. Today, what needs careful attention and constant contestation is not cultural retention, but the gendered approach to such retention.

Interestingly, there lies another neglected truth often beyond the commonsensical understanding. Every attempt on the part of second generation men in a new land to search for a bride from the original homeland, though appearing to be courtesy attitude outwardly, represents a selective inclusion.[23] The selective inclusion even at the best of its espousal leads to discriminatory exclusion, which is what has been taking place among the Indian diasporic communities. This rhetoric of social process purely followed on culture-based gender discrimination, if left uncontrolled, will have impending serious consequences directly on millions of diasporic Indian women, whose identities are

densely distributed, whose social stature finds no common platform to stand, whose voices lack unity and strength to express their unseen oppression, and not even any theoretical apparatus to expedite systematically their emancipation. It is at such a crucial juncture of confusion and unsystematic propositions, the need for understanding gender and its operation in diasporic communities becomes quite a palpable necessity. Interestingly, the substantive material needed to start a meaningful dialogue on the problem under consideration is more abundantly available in literary writings such as novels, short stories, biographies, lifestyle literary commentaries and descriptive opinion pieces than in social science research papers and administrative legal documents. It is in this particular context that the close examination of short stories by the contemporary author, Vassanji who has been extensively writing on such diverse aspects of life as immigration patterns, life of diasporic peoples in a new land, homeland cultural baggages, observation of new social practices, simultaneous retention of homeland cultures, multiple identities and most importantly, gender roles in diasporic life is worth undertaking.

Vassanji, who was born to the parents of South Asian lineage in Kenya, first moved to Tanzania and later migrated to Canada, from where he has been doing his best to paint the world around through his vibrant textual images and effective reach of communication. His writings are often brought before a wide-spectrum of readers in the form of novels and short stories, and they all carry consistent debates on vibrant notions of culture, norms across societies, reflective rituals of people across different sections of the same society and conglomeration of individual and collective identities.

The subsequent chapter will take up an exploratory survey of one of his well-read short story collections *Uhuru Street* (1992). Without diverting originally from the analysis of diasporic feminism, an attentive effort will be made to understand women characters in these sixteen short stories.

END NOTES

[1]Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practicing Solidarity.* New York: Duke University Press, 2003.

[2] Audre Lorde read the above mentioned poem as part of her commencement remarks in May 1989 at Oberlin College where Mohanty was teaching. This was actually published in January, 1989.

[3] Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders.* New York: Duke University Press, 2003. This phenomenon is taken from her essay 'Underwesternised: A Feminist Scholarship'.

[4]Mois G. Vassanji uses this term 'New Land' in his second book *No New Land* (1991) to address the land of opportunities that is Canada. However, this term can be applied to any land one migrates.
Vassanji, M. G. *No New Land.* Toronto: McClalland & Company Inc., 1991.

[5] Vassanji, M. G, *No New Land.* Toronto: McClalland & Company Inc., 1991.

[6] 'Vassanji':<< http://www.wikipedia.org/search>> accessed on Jul, 29 2007.

[7] The first short story collection- *Uhuru Street* contains 16 stories and the latest- *Elvis Raja* contains 12. In total, he has written 28 short stories and seven novels.

[8] Harris, J.R., M.R. Todaro. '*Migration Employment and Development: A Few Sector Analysis' American Economic Review.* 2.4 (1970): 126-142.

[9] Burawoy. 'The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labour: Comparative material from southern Africa and United States' *American Journal of Sociology.* 81.5 (1976): 1050-1080.

[10] Hoffman-Newton, H.J. 'A Sociological Approach Towards a General Theory of Migration' *In Kritz teal.* 2/1 (1981): 35.

[11] Anthony Giddens theory of Structuration is a compromise between the right and left views of various social issues. He first proposed his new theory in his book 'the third wave.'

[12] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.

[13] Schiller, Nina G., Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc-Szanton. eds. *Towards a Transnational perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered.* New York: Annals of New York academy of sciences, 1992.

[14] "Imagined Space": This is stated by Vassanji. Prof. Harish Narang presented Vassanji's view of "Imagined Space" on21/02/008 in a conference entitled 'Diasporic Writing' which was held at IGNOU, New Delhi.

[15] "Imagined Homeland": Prof. Harish Narang compared Rushdie's statement with Vassanji's in a conference held at IGNOU, New Delhi on 22/02/008.

[16] Diaspora theorists have noted this definition, as offered by Walker Connor is broad to be useful. For a critique of Connor, see Safran 83, Toloyan, *Rethinking,* 15, pp.29-30

[17] Khachng, Tololyan,, . 'The Nation-State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface' *Diaspora. 2.4 (1991): 4-5.*

[18]Hear, Van. *New Diaspora.* London: UCL Press, 1998.

[19] Safran, William. 'Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return' *Diaspora.* 1 (1991): 83-89.

[20] "Culture": <<http://www.wikipedia.org/search>> accessed on Feb, 12 2008.

[21] "Culture": <http://www.wikipedia.org/search> accessed on Feb, 12 2008.

[22] Vassanji, M. G. *Elvis Raja.* New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2006.

[23] Sen, Amartya. 'Pamphlet on Social Exclusion', 2006.

Chapter III

Migrant Life in Dar es salaam: A Gendered Perspective of *Uhuru Street* (1992)

Migrant Life in Dar es Salaam: A Gendered Perspective of *Uhuru Street* (1992)

You could not use them both together
even if you thought that way.
And if you lived in a place you had to
speak a foreign tongue
your mother tongue would rot,
rot and die in your mouth
Until you spit it out (Bhatt in Jain 177).

Sujata Bhatt's poem 'Search for My Tongue' wherein the above mentioned lines occur is about the loss of language and the inability to communicate as the native and the alien, try to coexist. Memories of childhood, cultural myths, grandmother's stories, Back-Home-Memories, and so on are all recollected in mother tongue, and pull one back home. They often matter even for the second generation and constitute the idea of oneself. As the Poet herself rightly puts it, no one can accommodate two tongues physically in one mouth. Complicated enough, therefore, is the issue of communication, whether it is of linguistic or cultural. This increasing complication becomes much more widened through writers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument, Cultural identity presupposes the language.[1] As the debate over cultural hierarchy, linguistic presuppositions, social priorities and customary preferences remain almost outside the purview of present investigation, what becomes significant for the present purpose is the recognition of intrinsically linked cultural values which frequently operate in diasporic life. Closely associated to such an intrinsic cultural operability in diasporic experiences is the construct of gender and its social character.

Beyond any doubt, culture envelopes all social categories of life. Culture as a broader category, therefore, does include linguistic category as a part of it. Bhatt's poem seems much relevant at this stage. In any diasporic life, cultural practices and linguistic identities are difficult to be fully ascertained. At the outset, diasporic

situations are often given identities, outside the homeland. Identity formation is an unconscious cultural process, attributable irrespective of one's own gender roles. Such a situational process, however, remains largely ambivalent. It is ambivalent because it is based on coexistence of two opposing attitudes, views or ideas.[2] To put it more contextually, diasporic life is an experience of "Self Dichotomy" between two cultures. It is this ambivalence inherent in every diasporic life which gradually becomes a mutually opposing cultural strategy, often creating an antagonism of self-versus-other. Given the survival compulsions and social-dynamics beyond an individual's control, it is the other which succeeds finally in eliminating the self---associated with homeland culture, mother tongue and past time memories. After all, it is the alien culture and language with which an individual begins making compromises at the expense of "his/her"[3] real identity. The ambivalent strategy under talk resembles closely around the "Fragmented Consciousness"[4] briefly dealt with in the previous chapter. This ambivalent strategy/fragmented consciousness is present in all migrant women of all generations. The experiences connected to the cultural ambivalence and fragmented consciousness; however, do differ largely from the migrant women in the first world to those that of the third world. Such a variation, in effect, brings out aptly the socio-economic and Political diversions within the lives of migrant women residing in the first and the third worlds. In her book *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the variation as "the third world difference." To restate briefly, it is this particular difference, frequently invoked through gender roles, that the present dissertation considers promptly under the broader guise of "Diasporic Feminism (DF)." This chapter is intended to make an exploratory investigation of one such issues, this time, related to Indian migrant women living at Uhuru Street in Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania. the success and sustainance of the homeland cultures of these migrant women, an agony between imposed prescriptions and impacted factors, all with a specific reference to the gender roles of south-asian migrants in general and Indian migrants in particular, will briefly be looked into.

M.G. Vassanji's first short story collection *Uhuru Street* [1992] serves as a primary text to explore the lives of South Asians in general and Indians in particular in East Africa. Furthermore, the history of migration of Indians to East Africa, survival strategies of single women, widowed mothers, respectable wives, unmarried

women, adult daughters and so on and their role in retaining their culture in the host nation i.e., East Africa are also been explored in this short story collection. The characters of Asian women whose intrinsic histories are woven through sixteen stories in this collection would be of immense help to explore the life of third world diasporic women in the third world. The third world diasporic women characterized in the short story collection are those who migrate from the third world countries of asian region as appendages to men, for survival, and may be for other professional purposes to the other third world countries, in this case, East Africa. It might be worth mentioning that the number of women migrating for professional purposes during the period under contradiction was non-existent.

East Africa, comprising three nations- Kenya, Tanganyika later known as Tanzania and Uganda, is a host land for large number of Asian immigrants. Despite Africa and Asia sharing the similar international identity popularly called, 'Third World', the differences like race, ethnicity, national status, identity, culture, customs, traditions, socio-economic and political milieus, climatic conditions, language, religion, are not as obvious as they are often miss-construed. In real life of a diasporic community, These obvious differences play a significant role in the retention of one's own homeland values and cultural routes. The predominance of these cultural roles becomes significant in all social spheres, be it the third world or the first world.

The Gunny Sack or the cultural baggage each woman migrant is expected to carry with her in the name of homeland culture or reminiscence come with more drawbacks than advantages. Patriarchy is one such deleterious effect. It is, however, not to suggest that patriarchal family structure is flawed in itself altogether. What is undeniably contestable is the imposition of masculinity or chauvinistic values on the women in the name of patriarchy as it leads to impending social-impairments of women life in general and diasporic women activities in particular. In the midst of all, as Vassanji has well depicted in his first short story collection *Uhuru Street,* diasporic women do fight for their lives and lead successful lives as single women, widowed mothers, unprotected daughters and socially-inhibited house wives.

Uhuru Street is situated in Dar es Salaam – the capital city of Tanzania.[5] Uhuru is a long narrow street that welcomed Indian immigrant families, who migrated

at various periods of time for a variety of reasons. To present the hard life of an Indian immigrant in East Africa Vassanji takes a house to house stroll in that historically stretched,[6] Long Street through his first short story collection. His short story collection enables us to realize that the Indian immigrant community here have long been living apart from Africans With their own cultural values carried from their home land as their Gunnies.[7]

Indian Migrants in Africa are labeled as Asian-Africans. In Justus Kizito Siboe's argument, to label a people is not only to represent those people but also to define them.[8] Whether they should be called as "Asian Africans" or "Afro-Asians" is still a debatable issue. Some argue that the Asian-African identity gives the valid meaning, since they have migrated from Asia and lived in Africa for many years. For them, the Homeland identity should presuppose that of host-land, as after all, the host-land is only a survival destiny. Moreover, any presupposition of host land identity over that of homeland might attribute equal legitimacy with indigenous population, leaving no distinct citizen roles for native-born. However, this argument holds more relevance only for the first generation Asian migrants. As the succeeding second and third generations, which also include Moyez G. Vassanji- an East African of South Asian descent, cannot be labeled as Asian Africans. This is because, second generation Asians in East Africa like Vassanji are born to Asian Africans. They are brought up by Asian Africans in the New Land with the home land culture. For the second generation Asians in East Africa, the homeland is shown through the way of dressing, mannerisms, food, myths and mythology, religion, oral narrations, language and all that which fall under the rubric of culture. But still, the homeland is an imagined space or an imaginary land for a second generation Asian in East Africa. Therefore, it is not appropriate to label the second generation Asians in East Africa as Asian Africans. The term Afro-Asians might well suit the purpose to represent the second generation Asians and the succeeding generations instead. The Afro-Asians experience a sense of nothingness and unhomeliness for being born in an alien culture. A sense of dilemma in practicing the imagined homeland culture prevails in the minds of Afro-Asians constantly. However, beyond any doubt, the culture, passed through oral narrations, remains as an image in receiver's mind, and the long practiced values do continue their hold on succeeding generations. Salim, an Asian Caribbean narrator, in V. S. Naipaul's novel *A Bend in The River,* recognises the

dilemma between the views expressed above. For Naipaul, "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it."[9] He expresses his pain of unhomeliness in the same novel:

> Africa was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made the difference. The coast was not truly African. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place, and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean. True Africa was at our back. Many miles of scrub or desert separated us from the up-country people; we looked east to the lands, with which we traded— Arabia, India, Persia. These were also the lands of our ancestors. But we could no longer say that we were Arabians or Indians or Persians; when we compared ourselves with these people, we felt like people of Africa" (Naipaul in Siboe 22).

According to Siboe, "Unhomeliness is a psychological experience of not feeling at home even in one's home because one is not at home in one-self. The condition of unhomeliness is normally brought about by a cultural identity crisis typical to many communities/individuals that/who exist as part of diaspora."[10] The Asian African character Nurmohamed Pipa in *Vasanji's The Book of Secrets* (1994), Asian Caribbeans in V.S. Naipaul's novels such as Mr. Biswas in *The House For Mr. Biswas* (1998), etc are some to illustrate the experience of unhomeliness.

The very term "Asian" itself appears problematic due to the geographical vastness of the continent with which it is associated. So then, would it be proper to call Indians in East Africa as Indian Africans or Indo-Africans? In fact, such a half-thought attempt will lead to further complications as identities of Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamilian, Marati, Bengali, and so on, existing within Indian society, can never be brought into a single cultural rubric. The questions of diasporic identity, therefore, seem to be far from any acceptable resolution, and the act of labeling any migrant community in the diasporia has no end. It is in this particular context, in fact, that the debate over the subtleties involved in the day-to-day lives of Indian diasporic women in East Africa assumes significance.

It might seem trivial for us to know through the writings of living legends that An Indian woman, brought up in a diverse multilingual society, previously subjected to caste, class, religious and gender discriminations in the home land, still continues to face the same obstacles in diasporia too, but that remains as the order of the day, and involves much more socio-cultural contours, which the present chapter tries to grasp to a large extent.

Asian-Africans have a long history of patterned migration and diasporic experience. The well-known and respected scholar of East Africa's interracial history, Robert G. Gregory in his monumental book *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations Within The British Empire, 1890-1939*[11] supports the idea of early Indian settlements even before the dawn of imperialism in East Africa, thereby providing a solid base to the belief that the contact between Asia and Africa was existing even prior to the British arrival to East Africa can be proved. By late 1900s, East Africa rapidly changed into a multi-cultural and multi-racial territory, and scores of settlers from Germany, Britain, Greece and India were intensifying their immigration into this favourable region. Vassanji captures this historical moment in his third novel *The Book of Secrets*, which opens with the arrival of the fictional colonial administrator Alfred Corbin and later that of the narrator Pius Fernandes as a teacher from Goa. This mass immigration notwithstanding, it must be remembered, that any point of confluence is of course a point of contestation. The socio-cultural and political inconsistencies widespread between the Indian and the white settler communities in East Africa clearly attest to this fact.

Like Arabs and Europeans, Indians too are immigrants in East Africa. The majority have come from the Gujarati-speaking areas of Kathi-awad and Cutch on the north western coast of India. Perhaps, there have been small settlements of Indian traders living in the coastal towns of East Africa for many centuries. Although Indian merchants have partly financed the slave trade, not many had themselves ventured into the interior. Moreover, their numbers on the coast were few, and the volume and the type of trade open to them were not conducive for encouraging any mass emigration of 'small' men from India. The conditions for a large immigration began to increase with the British Government in the late nineteenth century taking over the

administration of Uganda, and for strategic and other purposes began to build a railway from the coast to Lake Victoria in 1896. Most of the railway construction staff were brought from Punjab, among whom more than 90 per cent returned to India at the end of their contracts.[12] There also prevails a popular myth in East Africa that Asian Africans as the descendants of former Indian subjects. This pretext is well articulated in Tony Mochama's article, 'The Changing Face of Kenyan Asians' published in a popular local daily. His coolie myth got circulated amongst the masses throughout East Africa. Mochama, an investigative journalist says, "At the turn of the twentieth century, Asians descended in Kenya in thousands as part of the British engineering effort to construct the "lunatic" rail line from Mombasa to Kisumu. . ."[13] This gets supported by the personal testimony of Mrs. Harsita Waters who in the same article explains, "The coolies that is our babajis (grandfathers) and mamajis (grandmothers) were the first generation of Asians to set foot in this country..."[14] Although, it is a historical fact that a generation of Indians came to East Africa to build the colonial railways, it is an enduring popular fallacy that these coolies "were the first generation of Asians to set foot in this country. Therefore, Mochama's statement, which is well-established, but yet remains inaccurate myth lacking historical evidence, is well-debated by academic scholars.

Colonial labour records show that roughly two-thirds of Indian coolies who came to Kenya as part of British "engineering effort" went back home, as substantial population of the same succumbed to the inhuman conditions they did face. Scholars such as David Apter have contested the coolie thesis with solid historical evidence. According to him,

> The nature of Indian social organization was inappropriately understood by Europeans and Africans; in addition, a folklore had grown up about them which readily lent itself to prejudice. It was widely believed, for example, that the Indians who came to Uganda were actually indentured servants brought for work on the railways, which cannot be supported by a solid base. In an unpublished monograph, "Why Indians Came To East Africa," Nigel Oram writes that approximately 31,983 Indians were imported to East Africa, of whom 16312 were time-expired contract labourers and

> dismissed (the Indian Government permitting emigration for a term of three years): 6454 were invalided and 2493 died. Oram indicates, "This left 6274, presumably stayed in East Africa, unaccounted. "Since the Uganda portion of the unaccounted would remain relatively small, the myth of Indian coolies as the basis of the Indian population is easily discounted.[15]

The figures above overtly challenge any populist conviction that Mochama's Kenyan Asians could have all descended from the British coolie labour. This is especially so as the six thousand, two hundred and seventy four railway- workers that chose to remain were distributed all over East Africa, and not just Kenya. This, in essence, means that Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar shared the coolie labour left behind. Thus, Harsita Water's and Mochama's popular views seem far from the historical fact. The early European visitors to East Africa, the Portuguese, recorded Indian presence and flourishing Afro-Asians settlements all along the East African coast as early as the sixteenth century. This fact is contrary to the usual belief of Africans and Europeans in East Africa, who are convinced that the present Indian population is composed of the descendants of coolies who settled in the country. What in fact happened was that the long-established colonies of merchants, speaking Gujarati and not Punjabi, saw their opportunity when European technical skill opened a way into the interior, and extended their activities inland as fast as the railway was built. Indeed, the task of supplying goods, services, and transport for the builders would have been immeasurably greater without their help. They were soon joined by friends and relations from India who had the vision to see an opportunity in the need for trades and skills which the Africans could not then supply. The immigration to East Africa was therefore a spontaneous one. An enterprising young man who wanted to emigrate had to find his own fare across the ocean or persuade a relative already established in Africa to pay it and help him on arrival. For this reason the poorest classes in India did not come to East Africa, nor did the rich and well-educated. In addition, only those living reasonably close to convenient ports were likely to make the journey. Consequently, the Indian immigrants to East Africa were not usually unskilled labourers, as is evident in the case of Indian settlers in South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, and the West Indies, who had been recruited for plantation labour in

tropical agricultural colonies. The East African settlers were mainly petty traders and artisans. And although most of them came from villages, and had the experience of farming, almost none took to farming, which stood quite contrary to the hope of the administration of the East African Protectorate. Although it is impossible to ignore the widely acknowledged role of Asian Africans as a trading or entrepreneurial community in East Africa, a crucial point must be acknowledged at the outset. Not all sub-communities of Asian Africans are traders by tradition. The Goans, especially under the colonial governments in East Africa, were known for their inclination towards civil service, whereas the Khoja Ismaili community is well known for their interest in commerce and industry. Pipa[16]—by adoption—belong to the latter group whereas the narrator of *The Book of Secrets,* Pius Fernandes and Alzira's father in the short story 'Alzira'[17] belong to the former. By about 1910, the scene in East Africa was more or less set to reach its colonial climax. Administration and agricultural development were thought to be European occupations; trade and craftsmanship were relegated to Indians; and Africans were encouraged to work in the European agricultural system and to supply cheap labour in the towns developing in response to European and Indian activities. The picture doesn't seem to have substantially been altered in the forty years that have passed since then.

In the beginning, East Africans could not understand the difference between the Whites and the Asians, for both being aliens, especially in the hinterlands, they were considered to be partners in the colonisation of East Africa. As a racially distinct socio-cultural community in East Africa, Asian Africans, like any other diasporic communities across the world, had a complex past. Asian Africans/Afro-Asians in East Africa had to face a set of problems in their assimilation process, which included inter alia, political emasculation, socio-racial victimization, social demarcation and cultural occlusion. Most of these problems took place in a complex matrix of colonially-instigated ideas, attitudes, cultures, prejudices and philosophies, which stressed racialist nativism in the majority of indigenous Africans.

Strictly speaking, Asian Africans in East Africa as a cultural community neither acted as colonisers nor were colonized. They continued to live as an interstitial migrant community, which they thought, would be a better choice in a tripartite racial society. From this in-between location, writing, which is often shaped by

identity politics and other realities, is a challenging exercise for any Asian African writer. The East African society comprises of indigenous Africans: Negroid (Blacks), Caucasoid (Whites) and Asiatic (Browns) roots. Taban lo Liyong a critic, poet, novelist and short story writer,[18] argues that the above three important aesthetic roots anchor contemporary East African literary traditions. The indigenous African roots evident in the writings of Ngugi wa Thiongo, and the Caucasoid roots found in the writings of Elspeth Huxley, are the most widely acknowledged aspects of East African literature. Under this literary circumspection, the Asian African literary itinerary is represented by one such literary luminary M.G. Vassanji. To put his literary representation in his own words, as he himself has explained in an interview with Ray Deonandan,

> I tell stories about marginalized people. All writers do, whether people in question be a family of Jews in New York or farming community in Saskatchewan... I've had people who've moved from Nova Scotia to Toronto tell me that they can appreciate my stories because it speaks to them of their experience. Again, its one of marginalisation.[19]

Talking about the importance of Asian African literature in East Africa, Nyambura Mpesha observes,

> For the Tanzanian child [Asian African Literature] gives insights into the religion and culture of the Indian people. Their relevance of such a book is not just to make him worldly wise but to make him to get to know Indians better. Moreover there are a good number of Indians who form part of the Tanzanian nation and would have special interest in the literature (Mpesha in Siboe 27).

Such Asian African literature leaves an optimistic note for a legitimate space for Asian Africans in East Africa. These literatures not only talk about the grey areas, which Asians occupy, but also provide different opinions about Asians/Indians there in Africa. For instance, in Vassanji's first novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989), a post-independence Tanzanian politician, upon being invited to grace an Asian African function by presenting the keynote address, calls out, "The Asians are not integrating

enough! If you want to stay in Africa, you must learn to live with Africans... The days of your dukas are numbered!" (Vassanji 1989 162).

Asian African writings, flourishing in East Africa, portray the interstitial space, a middle area both in colour and status between whites and blacks. In fact, an endeavor to make sense out of "worlds in-between"[20] the black and white is increasingly becoming the leitmotif in almost all genres of writings of Asian Africans living in East Africa. Writers like Peter Nazareth, Bahadur Tejani, Pheroze Nowrojee, Jagjit Singh and Kuldip Sondhi have deeply captured and recorded the Asian African experiences in East Africa in their writings widely published in 1960s and early 1970s. Talking about the Asian African experience, Nazareth reiterates:

> Outside Eastern Africa, the Asian of East Africa were unknown. It was assumed outside that the issue was a Black and White one - a straight forward case of Africans versus Europeans. Asians in East Africa? Forming distinct, significant communities? The thought did not even cross the mind. Outside Africa, Asians were the invisible people of Eastern Africa - unnoticed, non-existent, irrelevant (Nazareth in Siboe 1).

The literary agenda of "in-betweenness" or interstitiality persists in the oeuvre of the contemporary young East African writer of South Asian descent,M. G. Vassanji's works.

Vassanji has increasingly been identified as "one of the finest younger African writers" and a vocal representative of the multifarious experiences of Asian Africans, especially East African indian descendants. Vassanji believes that writing is one of the powerful mediums of cultural communication. "If we don't write about ourselves, we might as well consider ourselves buried"[21] Vassanji feels. Vassanji's statement recapitulates, among many things, a constant renegotiation of diasporic self and diasporic identity, a mutually opposing cultural pandemonium. It must be made clear, however, that inner self and outer identity in diasporic life intrinsically exist for each other. In Jasbir Jain's words, "The diasporic identity is a cultural identity (the outer face which marks your status) inclusive of the self (the inner space which defines you

as a person), and is determined by choices of cultures and history" (Jain 177). It includes values, choices, character, desire, relations, and so on. Interestingly enough, these cultural traits and identity crisis have an entirely different connotation for every diasporic woman. Especially for a third world woman, the very choice of migration and destiny outside the homeland are often limited and tightly constrained. Their migration in most cases is simply an appendage to men. Their low-level educational status, lack of economic independence and particular cultural practices, all act strongly in her case. as a consequence of their homeland cultural stereotypes, The Indian diasporic women often face altogether a different set of problems in the diasporia. linguistic and caste affleation, gender discrimination, racial otherness, differences in the levels of education, economic and social status, employability in terms of value to the new land culture and personal compulsions and sensibilities stand as barriers to every step an indian woman takes even in her alien land. It must however, be confessed that concrete history about the third world diasporic women in general and Indian women in particular seems to be very scarce.

This gap is being increasingly filled by literature through various genres like short stories, novels, plays, poetry, autobiographies etc. It is under such a critical circumspection that Vassanji's effectively recorded lives of Indian diasporic woman and their migrant experiences in Dar es Salaam through his first short story collection *Uhuru Street* become relevant, and need to be probed in order to understand the difficulties these Diasporic women face in the diasporia.

Vassanji's *Uhuru Street*, the luminously woven collection of sixteen short stories, remains one among the widely read literary volumes for its simplicity in narration, style and approach. The stories woven in the collection depict day-today lives of Indian migrants in Dar es Salaam. Most of these stories are set in both colonial and independent Tanzania, a period between 1950s and 1980s. For instance, stories like 'Leaving', 'What Good Times We Had', and 'Refugee' express the need and quest of an Asian to leave for the first world due to the problems faced by Asian immigrants during late 1960s and early 1970s, a neocolonial period of East Africa. The story 'Breaking Loose' portrays the Indian culture, tradition, moral and mannerisms practiced amongst Asian/Indian communities. 'The London Returned' and 'All Worlds Are Possible Now' have the depiction of nostalgia, quest for identity

and creation of homes in the diasporia. Other stories like 'Abraham and The Business Men', 'English Lessons', 'For A Shilling', 'The Beggar' and 'The Driver' describe the darker side of life in Uhuru Street.

On the other hand, women characters like Zarina, Baby, Kulsum, Mehroon, Yasmin, Aloo's mother, Roshan mattress, Alzira, Varaa, Ramju's sister in the collection create an assorted sense of pain and pleasure in a reader's mind. Vassanji himself advises his readers, "Individuals are always placed within groups," insisting further, "My stories are about individual characters, but they must be seen in the context of their community."[22] Thus, *Uhuru Street* talks about the individual characters of Shamsi community, a fictitious name of the Khoja Ismaili community, which Vassanji himself belongs to.[23] In his first short story collection, Vassanji retains the place Uhuru Street and depicts the changes taking place in the socio-political milieu of Africa and consequently in the Shamsis, an Asian business community.

Iin her book *Postcolonial Critic,* Gayatri Spivak rightly points out, "The whole notion of authenticity, of the authentic migrant experience, is one that comes to us constructed by hegemonic voices; and so, what one has to tease out is what is not there." (Spivak 61). Such an authentic migrant experience about Asian communities in East Africa is found in Vassanji's short stories, filling up the gap which many writers and activists have long felt. Stories in Vassanji's first collection have been depicted close to living reality of south asian diasporic communities in East Africa. Class differences, racial prejudices and gender inequality, all have been well captured in Vassanji's narration.

The Story 'In The Quiet of A Sunday Afternoon' is a real reflection of class distinctions practiced by Asian communities in Africa. In the story, when the protagonist goes to Zarina's house to buy samosas[24] and vitambua[25], his father-in-law, nicknamed as German just because he knows to pronounce two German words, immediately follows him knowing pretty well where his son-in-law has gone to. As the narrator himself puts the incident, "One morning, he shuffled in as I sat kidding with the two women sipping tea and watching vitumbua frying in their woks. Indeed he muttered, "one also gets tea while one waits" (Vassanji 1992 6). The discussion followed thereafter is contemptuous. Observing his anger but respecting his

relationship, the narrator asks Roshan to bring chair for his father-in-law to sit. But German replies,

> I have no intention of sitting, I have a home. If it takes this long to cook vitumbua here, we can go elsewhere.... 'You are the daughter of Jamal Meghji' he said at length. 'Yes,' said Zarina.
>
> German loudly cleared his throat as if he were above to spit on the floor, then shuffled of to the door, stuck out his head out and spat.
>
> I knew your father,' he said when he returned. 'What town was he from?' 'Mbinga,' she answered. 'I know that! Where in India?' 'I don't know. In Cutch or Gujarat somewhere.' 'Mudra,' he said, nodding at me. 'I remember when he came to Africa.' She said nothing. (Vassanji 1992 7).

On their way back home, German tells his son-in-law the story of Jamal Meghji, repeating twice that he belongs to a third class family.

Vassanji's style of narration of events in the collection has been heart-rendering. While explaining, describing and analyzing the lives of Indians in Uhuru Street, Vassanji appears to be assuming the roles of both an immigrant and an alien. Protagonists and characters alike in *Uhuru Street* are depicted to have been living as minorities on social peripheries. The protagonist of the story 'In The Quiet of A Sunday Afternoon' is an orphan and treated as a half-caste because he is born to a black mother. Brought up by an Indian family as half servant and half son, he never gets any opportunity to live a life of his own. When a marriage proposal is brought home for him by Good Kulsum and German, he is freely offered without even being consulted for approval. In Another story, Alzira, the protagonist of the story 'Alzira', is a twenty-five year old girl, who works as a tailor to support her sick mother and drunken father, trying to prove herself to be an independent woman. In the story 'The Driver', Idi the protagonist, belongs to a servant class, and does all the jobs including driving for Mzee Pipa. One of his daily duties is to carry two food packets from home, of which one to be donated to the Mosque and the other to be handed over to Pipa's elder sister. Pipa's elder sister spends her life just sitting in front of the Mosque almost like a begger. She eagerly waits everyday for Idi to come with food packet and

expresses her anger over her brother to him. Grumbling herself, she furiously questions,

> Why are you late? I have not eaten all day, do you know that? Does your master know that? Who cares if an old woman starves, if she's sick, if she's dying...? Did you tell him not to come to my funeral? Tell him not to lay a foot there. Not to come to my funeral... (Vassanji 1992 55).

Pipa's sister, whose name remains unspoken throughout the story, is depicted to have been indulged in adultery, a reason precisely why she is kept isolated from the society, and eventually becomes a beggar. Similar narration is also evident in Vassanji's novel, *The Book Of Secrets.*

The protagonist of another Story 'Ali' is a farm boy, and works as a servant. Karim, the protagonist of the story 'Refugee', belongs to a lower class family, and goes as a refugee to Germany and from there to Canada just to earn money for his sister's marriage. The story 'The Beggar' has the black African, one armed beggar as its protagonist. In all these narratives, Vassanji is seen to be trying to portray the class distinctions and discrimination prevalent within the Asian diasporic communities living in East Africa through his collection, *Uhuru Street.* Gender discrimination is the other most social upheaval in these diasporic communities, which Vassanji tries to highlight in his collection.

Zarina in the story 'In The Quiet of A Sunday Afternoon' is a samosa seller. Upon entering Black's house one Sunday during her house to house selling trade, she finds herself in an appalling situation. While she is busy counting samosas and putting them in a plate along with Chutney in a manner to satisfy her customer, the thoughts of her obvious customer, Black revert to his libido. He imagines himself looking at her, "Oh, how long since I had a good woman before my days of respectability began. Her face was smooth and round, her hair long and wavy, tied at the back. What misfortune befell you, woman, that you are reduced to ferrying samosas," (Vassanji 1992 3). Unable to restrain himself, he looks at her dark, shiny eyes and touches her arm while paying a shilling for his samosas. Pulling her arm back, Zarina retaliates without hesitation orally, "aren't you ashamed, brother? Just because I am a widow and I come unaccompanied doesn't mean that I am a loose woman! My boy is asleep

and I didn't have the heart to wake him up" (Vassanji 1992 3). In the whole incident, Zarina's reply proves the fact that a woman feels that she will be taken for granted when she comes out unaccompanied by a male. Her verbal response reveals a commonly held sense of security by all women that their safety is ensured only as long as they are accompanied by a male, even if he is a kid. The event narrated in the story also attests to the point that a single woman in diaspora is as vulnerable as her counterpart at Homeland. It is told in the story that Zarina begins taking her ten year old male child along with her without fail every Sunday when she goes out house to house for Samosa sale. The story 'All Worlds Are Possible Now' also depicts a similar incident, but in a different context.

One remark by the protagonist in the story 'All Worlds Are Possible Now', makes Farida, a librarian in the Mosque library bring her son Karim and introduce to him with a challenging look, "This is my son Karim," (Vassanji 1992 137), probably trying to warn him that she too has a male protection. These incidents portrayed by Vasanji are part of the third world women's lives. What his short stories increasingly reveal is that these social practices are sustained even in the diasporic life of these third world women.

Fertility of a woman has a special significance in her social life be it in the first or third world. While trying to convince Black to marry Zarina in the story 'In The Quiet of A Sunday Afternoon', Roshan articulates, "You like this woman and touched her. And she is good and fertile, I tell you. Good and fertile!" Vassanji 1992 10).

Like Zarina, Nurali Kanji's wife in the story 'Abraham and The Businessmen' earns for her family, by selling Samosas. An idealist, intellectual and a proven impractical businessman, Nurali Kanji fails to lead a successful entrepreneurial life in this world of corruption and cowardiceness. He remains helpless even in raising a minimum loan to manage better his existing bookstore. Beaten up by his assailants in the disguise of women with broom sticks and sticks on his way back home for lunch one day, Nurali Kanji never stands as a successful businessman in the community thereafter. It is under these unforeseen situations that his wife plays a vital role in improving the economic status of the family by selling samosas. In the same story,

Vassanji's clear depiction of "Bastard! Satan! Where's the bitch that bore you?" (Vassanji 1992 96), the abusive language used by Nurali Kanji's assailants, exposes the darker side of diasporic Indians. Interestingly in this case, Such language is generally used against women and their motherhood. But when it is used against a man, it would be with a conviction that he is quite incapable of standing as a man and is far short of his masculinity.

Marriage, a widely known social institution/practice plays an important role in the lives of all the women, especially Indians. Women are given their due respect only when they are married than when they settle down as single. Advising Alzira, the protagonist of the story 'Alzira', Mehroon's mother cautions,

> 'You should also get married.' deftly snapping the sewing thread from the stitching material on her lap with a smile, Alzira responds 'I'm in no hurry mama. I'll bide my time. I don't want to marry any old person and regret it for the rest of my days!' 'Don't be too choosy. It will be too late then. There is nothing like having a man of your own, I tell you. Even if he be one-eyed or lame- A man is a man. Without a man you'll be nothing. Haven't you had any good offers?' (Vassanji 1992 24).

Alzira is a twenty-five year old girl who has a sister and a brother – Maria and Pius respectively. Her mother is a thin, sickly creature and her father a retired civil servant, who comes out of house only either for a newspaper or for buying alcohol. Although not a professional tailor, Alzira makes her living and supports the family by her sewing work. Throughout the story, a belief that a woman cannot live without marriage and a man is expediently needed for protection and well being is emphasised. This perception among the Asian communities seems much stronger than other values they carry with them into the diasporia.

Initially, John Fernandes, a history teacher at the boys' school shows his interest in Alzira. As a gesture of his fondness of her, he often drives her on his bike, and eventually gets prepared to marry her. But finally, the refusal from his family arises for reasons too stereotypical. Alzira is considered unworthy to be accepted as a

daughter-in-law because she is uneducated, and too tall a woman. In fact, the ground for refusal lies not in the silly reasons exposed superficially, rather in the class distinction felt by Fahndo's mother. Probably, she doesn't want her son to be married to a simple, uneducated tailor. Fahndo too doesn't appear to be much different from his mother, who is not ready to come out of her fixed mindset. Being a teacher himself, he fails to respond with proactive outlook when circumstances demand it.

Alzira does have a distant relative in Goa, who writes to her frequently. But neither she can go to Goa to marry him from East Africa probably due to her economic status nor he can come to Dar es Salaam because his mother needs a constant care. Dictated by ultimate destiny, therefore, Alzira is depicted to have remained unmarried throughout her life. The depiction of Alzira's life brings forth certain bitter conclusions, suggesting Marriage not as a healthy social institution rather a constraining factor for women on gendered lines.

The same story also repeats itself in the failure of Maria's marriage, which Mehroon's mother explains, "Birth, Marriage and death were preordained. You had many choices in life: but not with these three." (Vassanji 1992 25). Not very different from Mehroon's mother, many amongst the Indian business communities, who lived in and across the Uhuru Street, are shown to have believed that it is "Kismet" which decides good and bad for a person. Vassanji observes these minute, cultural traits and depicts them vividly in his short stories.

Despite the significance attached to marriage, restrictions practiced in its observance are heavily constraining among the Asian diasporic communities. Such restrictions, clearly evident in Vassanji's narrations, are more binding on women than on men. An Asian woman in the diasporia cannot even think of a black or a white man to be her preferred choice for marriage as her desires are often given less or even no attention and recognition when compared to those of men. An interview with Alexander D'Souza, a sixty-one year old goan teacher, is particularly revealing in understanding better this complex reality: "The movie Mississippi Masala made me vomit. No Asian girl can ever fall for a black man like that because conservatism is naturally built in her. Even though, my own wife is an African, I will not tolerate if any of my daughters ever became involved with an African man."[26] Regretting over

the freedom given to Asian men to have any woman as wife and denying the same to their female counterparts, Farida Jaffer notes,

> Asians accept it when men have affairs. But they think that women don't have sexual needs and sex for women is just a duty to procreate. ... A lot of Asian men here have ... a "respectable" wife who is an Asian-the visible wife. And then there is always an invisible African wife... The Asian wife is not supposed to satisfy you in bed, so you go for the African woman. It is a myth here that they are all very good in bed.[27]

An Asian diasporic woman in Africa is expected to safeguard her community even if her "uprightness" gives her husband an excuse to have an affair with African women. Moreover, an Asian woman is considered too conservative and too sheltered, the one who is taught to be respectable, always pleasing her husband. Arguing from the indian standpoint, Lata Mani and Partha Chatterjee observe so arduously, "The weak, pure and submissive woman comes to represent tradition and respectability for the entire Asian community."[28]. Their argument proves the existence of those literary fallacies which are ready to celebrate the stringently imposed social upheavals on the asian diasporic women in the name of cultural purity and social submissiveness.

Vassanji also touches upon the inter-racial marriages between and sexual attraction across the Asian and African youngsters. These have been well depicted through a woman Character, Yasmin Rajan in the story 'Breaking Loose.' Yasmin is the only daughter amongst three brothers born to a pawnbroker and the owner of a tailoring shop. She falls in love with Daniel Akoto, an African visiting professor from the University of Ghana. Once she brings Akoto her home to show him their three old gramophones. Taking a serious note of her daughter's action, Yasmin's mother shouts at her in front of him, "how can you bring him here like this? What will the neighbours think? And the servants? It's shameful!" Yasmin replies, "But mummy, he is a professor! I don't care even if he's professor's father!" (Vassanji 1992 86). For Yasmin's mother, like for any Asian woman, bringing unknown men to the house and unmarried girls talking to men lead to the loss of dignity, honour and prestige of the family. Yasmin's mother is the best illustration of Tanzanian Asians, who still stick to their ancient customs even in the global era, where India itself seems to have

undergone radical changes in her socio-economic-political and cultural spheres, moving away from tribalisms and antique traditions.

In another similar event of closed verbal war, Yasmin's mother issues her daughter a stern warning, "There are no friendships with men not with men we don't know." The father observed quietly, "The world is not ready for it" (Vassanji 1992 87). The mother, who always abhors Yasmin due to a superficial belief that daughters bring shame and dishonour to the family, screams on her husband, "You stay out of it! This is between us two" (Vassanji 1992 87). What her mother fails to realize is the fact that Yasmin too is not ready to break Indian customs and tradition. But she is a rationally educated, matured, a typical Asian who is equally bothered about the preservation of Indian culture and tradition. Once when Prof. Akoto in a dance party comments that Asians are westernized, mesmerized and ape the Europeans, in response to which she sends a reactionary note,

> Dear Professor Akoto, I wanted to tell you something. I thought I should tell it to you before I forget it completely. You called us Asians colonized. We are mesmerized with the west, you said. Well, have you observed yourself carefully lately? Well All those European mannerisms, language, clothes, suits even in hot weather: You are so much the English gentleman yourself.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> Yasmin Rajan.
>
> P.S. could one borrow Omari's *Wait For Me* from you after all?
>
> Thanks (Vassanji 1992 84).

Yasmin shows enough enthusiasm in knowing about Indian history and culture, reads a variety of related books during her holidays and does have deep discussions with her father on the present and past Indian customs. This proves her interest in knowing the Indian culture and about India.

Homeland racial disparities in matters of marriage and customs continue to have their hold on the lives of the Asian diasporic communities even decades after

their distance from the homeland social locales. Ali, a black farmer and a servant at Mehroon's house wishes to marry Mehroon and expresses his wish confidingly to the narrator, "I shall marry her" (Vassanji 1992 19). As soon as his desire is known to the family members, he gets dismissed from the house. Under no circumstances, Asians allow their daughters to get married either with a black or with any other man different from their own race and lineage, a practice which is also quite evident in Vassanji's novel, *The In-Between The World of Vikram Lall* (2003). In this novel, Deepika, usually called Deepa by her pet name, wishes to marry a black African, Njoroge William. On hearing Deepa's desire, her mother issues her a severe warning,

> Don't mention him in front of the Sharmas now—
>
> What do you have against Njo anyway? All you Asians think is that these African men are after your innocent, virtuous daughters—Well, I'm glad at least you're not planning to marry him---I didn't say that---A mighty ruckus broke out. The shock wave of realization finally swept over Mother, the truth about Njoroge and Deepa, which explained Deepa's strange giddy behaviour of last two months, and the previous day's offending silliness at the supreme. Don't think about such things! Mother screamed, almost in tears. It is not a joke, you bad girl----Mother! I didn't say I was marrying him—but if I was, it would be my wish, wouldn't it? And what's wrong with it. We don't live in colonial times anymore, or in India-Desh, this is a new Africa---Don't say that! Mother wailed. (Vassanji 2003 189).

Overhearing the mother-daughter controversial conversation, Deepa's father comes out of his living room and convincingly adds flavour to his wife's argument,

> Get this in your head, Deepa, he is an African, Papa said. He is not us. Not even in your wildest dream can you marry an African. What do you mean? What's wrong with an African? *I* am an African. What hypocrisy! And all the nice faces you showed around your Njoroge-William while he was here----
>
> Mother took a deep breath and replied, There's nothing wrong with being an African or an Asian or an European. But they can't mix. It doesn't work. (Vassanji 2003 189).

The above conversation, if observed closely, reflects an increasing, conscious gap of cultural understanding between first generation Indian mothers in East Africa on one hand, and the rationally educated second generation Indian daughters on the other. But on a positive side, both the mothers and daughters seem to have convincing social-base in support of their socio-cultural preferences. Since home is too far, Mothers wish to keep their customs and traditions intact for all the generations to come. But the second generation daughters, on the other hand, are often eager to follow the new ways and take the life as it comes.

One day Njoroge visits Deepa's mother to express his condolence on Deepa's grandfather's death. Although the meeting takes place at a moment of grief, both of them see it as an opportunity to exchange their views with each other. Deepa's mother takes the lead and tells him sternly,

> William Njoroge, I forbid you to see my daughter in the way you have been seeing her. You are like a son to us, she is your sister.
>
> But mother, he began ... No. No, I say. I have no one in the world except my brother and my children. I want you to understand that. I have lost my home in Pakistan. I have no cousins or uncles or aunts, no parents. At least, let me have a normal family, where I can see my grandchildren grow up as Indians, as Hindus. I had dreams too, of children and grandchildren- whom I can understand, can speak to... and bring up in our ways. I have nothing against Africans. But we are different. You are a brother to my son and daughter, you are their best friend. But a husband to Deepa—no, Njoroge. The world is different, mother, he said, but she didn't reply, simply stared at him with her large grief-stricken eyes. I have lot of opportunities in this country, Mrs. Lall. Mother... A lot of exciting times ahead that will help to heal my hurt. But Deepa—she is a girl—you'll break her heart, mother. You'll never be able to give her happiness your way. I said I forbid

> you, but no, I go down on my knees and beg you. Let go her!
> (Vassanji 2003 214-215).

The above depiction of a conversation between an Indian mother and African male aspirant looking forward to marry a second generation Indian girl attests to the fact that race, class and gender are implicit in the Asian diasporic lives.

Even the commonness of religion, i.e, Islam, otherwise well-considered a unifying force, seems to play very little or no role in obliterating the social barriers constructed across regions and races. The story 'The Sounds of The Night' provides a vivid distinction between an African mosque and an Indian mosque, projecting the real racist attitude towards the Africans showed by Asians. An eight year old boy, while he is on his way to the Indian mosque in the early morning, encounters a tall, black African man in a long traditional robe strolling in a dark street with a tasbih in his hand calling out the African mystic, a great soul. The boy, with a great sense of fear, tries to cross that place, but only to be caught by the African man. He asks the boy,

> 'Where are you going to, child?'
> 'To the mosque.'
> 'The Indian mosque' 'What do you do there?'
> 'We pray.'
> 'You don't pray, you make fun!' He started mocking. 'Ai-yai-yai-nyai,' he sang in a high-pitched voice.
> Partisanship got the better of me and in a rage I cried,
> 'We don't make fun! We pray! It is you who make fun!'
> (Vassanji 1992 67).

Children getting attracted to their opposite sex at an early age is a universal phenomenon. Luci Irigaray's 'Feminist Deconstruction of Western phalocentrism' *reveals the differential treatment adopted in considering man and woman as equals. She also explores* the roots of woman as a subject and kind of subjectivity in which the other is recognized.[29] This is more evident in the story 'For A Shilling'.

In the story 'For A Shilling', Ahmed pretends himself to be knowledgeable in the matters of sex and tries to overpower the other boys in the Street with his self-importance. One day, a group of boys sitting on the steps of a store at the street corner wait for a teenage walker to be seen, and when a pretty girl passes by, they chant, "Oh my sweet arse! Milky-milk-white!" (Vassanji 1992 40). The protagonist of the story 'For A Shilling' repeats this to his two elder sisters, and they love it and make him to repeat it again and again. This incident depicts one of the very rarely observed and less talked phenomenon of adolescence. At the initial stage of youth, opposite sexes often get attracted to each other, and find pleasure in its gratification equally. But this recurrent phenomenon is never allowed to be openly spoken about amongst Asian communities. Vassanji's depiction of street boys' comments on teenage female passers-by, and the sexual restrictions placed upon by familial parameters also bring out to the forefront the hidden routes of adultery, which are never allowed to be openly discussed among Asian diasporic communities. In the eyes of Asian diasporic communities, premarital sexual relationship is the worst evil deed one can possibly indulge in. For them, it has equal social repercussions either at homeland or in the diasporia.

Selling the knowledge of sex is another apparent paradigm shift depicted in Vassanji's short stories. Ahmed and Amin indulge in selling the knowledge about sex and sexuality for a shilling. The story 'For A Shilling' is a sarcastic comment on the societal norms and values, a brief account on the attraction towards the opposite sex. The story gives a detail account of the things socially prohibited to be told openly according to the Asian tradition. This prohibition applies more to women than to men. By narrating these prohibited events in his writings, Vassanji seems to be providing a textual resistance to existing social order.

Similarly, the story 'English Lessons' talks about naughty and curious children who try to invade the life of a Eurasian teacher, Stuart. Being an Assistant Head Master of the school and an English teacher, he often digresses in the class. Considering himself to be a civilizing missionary, he once delivers a lecture on the use of western toilets constructed in the school. Instructing his students as how to use the toilet, he says, "Do you think the bowl is there to wash your faces in, you numbskulls? And tell your other teachers the seat is not to be mounted either! The

other teachers were Indians (Vassanji 1992 60). Teachers like Stewart always instill racial hatred in the young minds. Vassanji's ability to capture even these minute details in his writings is really laudable.

Vasanji's short stories also reflect women's assertion, forced independence, self-trust and committed social-life. His narration of a widowed mother, who loses her husband at the age of 33 but never entertains an idea of second marriage, represents one such connotation. In her judgement, the second marriage would make her five children orphans. She runs a store in the Kichvele Street that later came to be known as Uhuru Street, working all the day to raise her children. The success of her life lies in her ability to provide good education to the children. She gets her two daughters married, and puts all her hopes on her younger son, Aloo, who too succeeds in his life. She sells away her store and moves to the residential area of Upanga after Razia's marriage, thereby marking an upward movement, both social and economical. More than a mere upward movement, however, her depiction denotes an independent, self-resistant, woman's achievement despite widespread prevalence of prejudicial social prohibitions. As a widowed woman, she is more conscious about her role as a mother than a widow. Amidst the successful life of a third world diasporic, responsible mother, there comes a heart-breaking occasion when the son goes abroad for higher studies.

Aloo, a sacrificing mother's loving son, happens to come in close contact with Mr. Datoo, a former teacher and student of his School, who comes from America on a tour. As a word of advice, Mr. Datoo suggests all the students to apply for studies in universities abroad. Encouraged by his advice, Aloo applies and gets selected for the California Institute of Technology. Initially, it is a surprising, unbelievable news for his mother. When she is informed that four hundred dollars have to be paid for his visa, mother asked, "How many shillings that would make?" (Vassanji 1992 73). On being told that it would be three thousand shillings, she is shocked, and questions angrily, "How are we going to raise this three thousand shillings? Have you bought a lottery? And what about the ticket? Are they going to send you the ticket too?" (Vassanji 1992 74). Her anger is not because she does not love her children, but because her son is trying to venture out for a prospect for which she cannot support him. In her furious anxiety she continues: "Why do you want to go away, so far? Is

this what I raised you for—So you could leave me to go away to a foreign place? Won't you miss us, where you want to go? Do we mean so little to you? If something happens..." (Vassanji 1992 74). More than her economic inability, the story 'Leaving' also reiterates an emotional conflict between motherly love and a youngster's quest for achievement. She also has an equal suspicion about the western lifestyle, which she thinks might have an impact on her son's future attitude. Finally, when Mr. Velji, the former administrator of Aloo's school approves it after a clear reading of the admission letter, she too accepts his going away but with certain conditions she puts to Aloo: "Promise me that if I let you go, you will not marry a white woman. And promise me that you'll not smoke or drink". (Vassanji 1992 78). Her preset conditions on her son's future lifestyle show a case of clear depiction of suspicions of a third world woman about the first world lifestyle. In all possibilities, She is a typical Indian/Asian mother who possesses all the qualities- care, love, dedication for children, honest wife, responsible mama of the house, and so on.

Besides the multidimensional, textual representation and rich content, The literary success of 'Uhuru Street' should equally be attributed even to the style and unique character depiction, which runs across stories in the collection. Most of the stories are intrinsically woven around an anxious narrator, often a young boy, who is a precocious observer of parents, siblings and neighbourhood. When Alzira, a dressmaker in the story 'Alzira' does not find a suitable partner for herself, she pitches out her desire on a young boy, the narrator, "I'll wait for him to grow up!" His mother replies, "Take him now! I've had enough of him" (Vassanji 1992 26). Cautiously observing the events around him, the young narrator remarks, "I liked Alzira and was flattered by her remark. There was something in her that deeply touched me and warmed me to her. She was plain but jolly, and deep, kind, not frivolous" (Vassanji 1992 26).

The unnamed, young narrator in the collection is present in five stories - 'Ali', 'Alzira', 'The Sounds of The Night', 'The Relief From Drill' and 'Leaving'. A consistent, narrative quality of these five stories gives them an outlook of a short novel. For instance, five of them narrate a series of incidents happening in a single family, the ultimate progress of which is depicted in the story 'Leaving.' Judging on his observational similarity, the same narrator can also be assumed to be present in

other stories 'The Beggar', 'The Driver', 'English Lessons', 'Ebrahim and The Businessmen', 'Breaking Loose', 'What Good Times We Had' and 'Refugee.' However, the stories like 'In The Quiet of A Sunday Afternoon', 'The London Returned' and 'All Worlds Are Possible Now' have been depicted by different individual narrators. Written in the first person narrative, these stories in particular have certain similarities.

Vassanji introduces no woman narrator in his entire collection of *Uhuru Street.* Instead of viewing it as a shortcoming on the part of author, it seems more realistic to consider that the textual characters presented in his collection are not realistically suitable for a female narrator. The style adopted throughout *Uhuru Street* also drives home a point that women among Asian communities in East Africa are always kept on the social margins.

Pipa's third daughter's suicidal death due to the tortures of her drunkard husband in the story 'The Driver', Vassanji's description in the story 'Refugee' of a woman's body hanging upside down from a tree near the beach side, a male bank clerk's warrant of murdering a rich woman in the story 'What Good Times We Had', all too suggest the death of women to be more violent and inhumane. Despite the frequent series of women deaths, the death of a male appears very rare. Jamal Meghji and Ebrahim Kanji's father are the only two men whose death incidents are narrated in this collection, which are reported to have occurred due to their poverty and excessive family responsibilities.

The collection has a depiction of women being denied opportunities for their higher education and freedom of choice in their life. Farida, an anxious aspirant of college education in the story 'Farida', is married off to a bad husband by her spiritual father. Although Yasmin in the story 'Breaking Loose' is allowed to go to the University, she is humiliated by her mother just because she brings home an African Professor.

To be impartial to Vassanji's inability to introduce a woman narrator in his collection *Uhuru Street*, it would have proven largely a laboured task on his part to explain actual social realities, had he chosen a woman narrator fictitiously. The next

chapter will take up the prevalence of life within the institution of home in another diasporia i.e, Canada. The operation of gender roles amongst the South Asian communities in the first world is also elaborated keeping Vassanji's second short story collection - *Elvis, Raja* (2006).

End Notes:

[1] Jain, Jasbir. *Beyond Postcolonialism: Dreams and Realities of A Nation.* New Delhi: Rawat publications, 2006.
[2] 'Bhabha, Homi K. ed. *The Location of Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1994.
[3] It is interesting that often it is he who is ready for such compromises. A woman migrant, in this particular case, is expected to play rather a very delicate social role.
[4] This is mentioned as the third type of Consciousness in the first Chapter of this dissertation.
[5] 'Uhuru': It means independence in Swahili. This detail is present in one of Vassanji's short story 'Leaving'. Vassanji, M.G. *Uhuru Street.* United Kingdom: Heinemann International Literature and Text books, 1992.
[6] Uhuru Street has a long historical sketch. It was known as Kichvele Street in pre-colonial period of East Africa and after independence it is known as Uhuru Street. In Swahili 'Uhuru' means independence. Only Indians live in this street for decades together and thus, it has a history.
[7] 'Gunnies' means the heavy load which is carried with one person like a trunk carried by Salam Juma in Vassanji's first novel *The Gunny Sac* to preserve one's culture. Vassanji, M.G. *The Gunny Sac.* United Kingdom, London: Heinemann International literature and Text Books, 1989.
[8] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[9] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[10] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[11] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[12] Mochama, Tony. 'Stepping Out of Segregation: The Changing Face of Kenyan Asians' *Society Magazine, Sunday Standard,* 4 (2004): 5-6.
[13] Mochama, Tony. 'Stepping Out of Segregation: The Changing Face of Kenyan Asians' *Society Magazine, Sunday Standard,* 4 (2004): 5-6.
[14] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[15] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[16] 'Pipa': He is the major character in Vassanji's third novel *The book of Secrets.* Vassanji, M.G. *The Book Of Secrets.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Company, 1994.
[17] '/Alzira': This is the story in Vassanji's short story collection *Uhuru Street.* Vassanji, M.G. *Uhuru Street.* United Kingdom: Heinemann International Literature and Text Books, 1992.
[18] "Taban lo Liyong": He is born in Sudan to Ugandan parents. His real name is Mokotiyang Rekenet which means "born at night". His mother later re-named him as Liyong after herself, and Taban means "tired" in Arabic. <<http://www.wikipedia.org/search> accessed on 1st Jun, 2008.
[19] This quote is taken from Deonandan's electronic magazine in the website, <http://www.deonandan.com/search> accessed on 20 Sep, 2007.
[20] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[21] Mutahi, Wahome. 'Memories Of yesterday's Home' *Lifestyle Magazine,* Sunday Nation Nairobi. 27 Oct. (1991): 13.
[22] This quote is taken from the Interview with M. G. Vassanji by Ray Deonandan from his electronic magazine. <http://www.deonandan.com/search> accessed on 25 Nov, 2007.
[23] Siboe, Justus Kazito. "The Worlds In-Between of An Asian African Writer: A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji" Diss Kenyatta university, 2006.
[24] 'Samosa': an Indian snack made of flour and stuffed with boiled potato
[25] 'Vitambua': in Swahili it means sweet dried bread
[26] Interview with Alexander D'Souza on 12 Aug, 1993.
<http://www.scholargoogle.com//search> accessed on 20 Nov, 2007.

[27] Interview with Farida Jaffer (Alias) on 26 Jan, 1993.
<http://www.scholargoogle.com/search>> accessed on 20 Nov, 2007.
[28] Chaterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* New York: Princeton University Press, 1993.
[29] Whitford, Margaret. Ed. *The Irigaray Reader.* New York: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991.

Chapter IV

Thinking Back Home:
The Portrayal of Gender in *Elvis, Raja* (2006)

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> While South Asians have been trotting the globe since antiquity, the last two hundred years saw them moving as indentured workers, railway workers and traders to several corners of the British Empire. They went to the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius and East and South Africa during nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as sugar and agricultural workers, artisans, technicians, teachers, lawyers and doctors and petty traders. Although they did trickle into the United States and Canada as agricultural workers and lumbermen during the nineteenth century, their numbers on this continent began to grow only after mid sixties, after these continents amended their racist immigration policies directed against the South Asians (Mukherjee in Aziz IX-X.)

Arun Prabha Mukherjee, an Indo-Canadian writer,[1] in her introduction to *Mother's Ashes* (1994), points out in detail the impelling causes for this huge global migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Working labourers and qualified professionals alike began searching for new destinations hoping for better life and tangible rewards for their vocations. In Mukherjee's assessment, caste, class, religious and ethnic affiliations, which often act as decisive forces of south-asian life, did not appear to have played a much constraining role in this process. But The post colonial prejudices of race, ethnicity, identity and gender continued to have their trickling affect in the lives of South-Asian migrants in the new land.

Although the process of migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became inevitable due to growing needs and demands, it was not completely free from political regulations and national interests of state powers. For instance, the United states of America and Canada allowed free flow of migration only after suitably amending their domestic laws relating to racial discrimination and racial treatment. These discriminatory laws which came under the strict scrutiny of western

states at that time were directed towards African migrants in particular and Asian ones in general. Any discussion on the effects of and reasons for these laws and their subsequent developments around the world is outside the purview of this chapter. What remains important for the present debate, however, relates to the way in which this huge migration occurred, and immigrants in the first world have been living a life between two worlds – their homeland and the host land which became their new destination. It is the later part of this dual process with which the present chapter is concerned most.

To begin with, it might be proper to first understand how third world migration to the first world began and was understood. Because, in all probabilities, it is this understanding both by immigrants themselves and others, which has been playing an influencing role in the migrant life of third world population in the first world. The South Asian communities living in the north American continent[2] today can be classified into two immigrant sections – those south Asians who directly reached the first world destinations such as Canada and the united States and those South Asian who first migrated to elswhere and then from there to the North American continent. While the first set of immigrants are identified as South Asian-Canadians or South Asian-Americans according to their present residence, the identity of the second set of immigrants remains ambiguous. They are sometimes recognized simply as third world immigrants of South Asian origins. In theory, their identity is often understood to be doubly displaced one. For instance, when Karim, the protagonist of the story 'Refugee' in the short story collection *Uhuru Street*, is caught in his identity crisis and begins proclaiming himself as a refugee, his friend Anand advises him, "You will be let off in a boat some miles from the coast. Throw away your passport. Say you are from Lebanon. Do not worry. Canadians can't tell the difference yet" (Vassanji 1992 129). Karim in the narration is an East African of Indian descent. A Muslim, Gujarati and an Indian born in Dar es Salaam, Karim migrates to the first world as a refugee to earn money for his sisters' marriage. Traveling with fractured identities, Karim stands as the best example of a doubly displaced person in the first world, and belongs to the second set of immigrants. Indian African Canadian[3] or South Asian African Canadian are the terms readily available to westerners to refer to second type of immigrants like Karim. Such a widely known practice of identity politics leaves open an important question as to

what extent would it be acceptable to recognize more than half of the world population as third world citizenry simply because of their brown complexion. Although finding out answer to this question might involve a complex cultural inquiry, what seems to be a plausible reason behind this notion is the premeditated attitude drawn from the colonial legacy by the West. People in the western hemisphere can hardly make any distinction among the population migrated from Asia or Africa except their colour. This is not simply because of their inability to do so, but for they are often unprepared to accept the distinct identities of the East. For the West, rest of the world is full of uncivilized species, whose burden the project of their colonization took up and carried out until it was met with a strong resistance. It was this project of colonization which brought to surface the differences, and created a divide between so-called "First and third Worlds." This is of course a separate question, which goes beyond the scope of our present problematic. But the knowledge that existing identities are based on a racial construction makes the task easier. And it further helps to reclaim that South-Asian identity, as a homogeneous unit is a contesting field. Contestable also is the third world identity, which clubs together both Asian and African population and their cultures simply of analogous variety. The third world identity becomes more problematic, and in no way reflects the living reality of people either at home or abroad. Given these complexities of identity, it would be proper to exercise a contextual care instead of fully dismissing the usage of various terms such as South-Asian or the third world which serve to denote identity. It is with the same spirit that the term third world is used with different contextual meanings both in the previous and present chapters. While the previous chapter is concerned with internal migration within the third world itself, this chapter focuses on outer migration i.e. from third world to the first world. As it has already been stated above, there is an implicit distinction in understanding the term third world used in the previous chapter and the present one. This understanding becomes clear when we begin looking at the way immigrants were treated by the host land people and their governments. Although the western world often considers both Asia and Africa as the third world, the Asians in East Africa received neither any favour nor preferential treatment either from African government or African people. They were always looked down with suspicion by the natives there. Finally, many of them were even forced to leave the African continent and migrate to the first world nations, thereby proving the analogous third world identity to be too fragile. The present chapter deals

with the later process of migration from so-called third to the first world in general and Canada in particular. As was done in the previous chapter but with a different regional dimension, the lives of third world women, who migrated to the first world, will briefly be explored in this chapter, keeping M.G. Vassanji's another luminous short story collection *Elvis, Raja* (2006) as a primary reference point.

Vassanji's short stories 'The London Returned', 'Refugee', 'Leaving', 'What Good Times We Had' and 'All Worlds Are Possible Now' - all part of his first story collection, *Uhuru Street* talk about the East Africans of South Asian descent who migrated to the west, especially to Canada and other countries like United Kingdom and United States during the 1970s. The policies of the socialist Government in Tanzania between 1967-1976 which were directed for the elimination of non-African races from the Continent Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda and subsequent developments taking place in the African Continent caused large migration of persons of Asian descendent in Africa to new destinations in a new world. The painful experience of this large-scale exodus finds a touching expression in the narration of 'When She Was Queen' .

> We left Kenya for Toronto a year after the Asians of neighbouring Uganda were expelled by the dictator Idi Amin, in the early seventies. It was a traumatic uncertain time for the Asians of East Africa. Fearing impending disaster, John chacha had wound down his business, sold the Rose hotel and left Kisumu; my father was again out of job (Vassanji 2006 15).

Due to Tanzanian socialist policies and dictatorial rule of Idi Amin in Uganda, the decade of the 1970s witnessed a mass Asian immigration from East Africa to the west- United Kingdom, Canada and North America. Economic instability became a major factor among the Tanzanian Asians. Even acquiring a visa became a difficult task for those willing to escape their precarious existence. Under these circumstances, the migration from Africa to the West took many forms during this period. While some like Karim in the story 'Refugee' migrated as refugees, others like Aloo in the story 'Leaving' flew away in the name of higher education. The story 'The London Returned' is a tender romance woven through the couple who marry and go to

Toronto where they develop their own Uhuru Street, an independent Avenue in a typical western style. Within a few days of their settlement in an independent avenue, Amina expresses her desire for greater freedom, the idea of which she couldn't have even entertained in her third world life. But her ideas find no acceptance. Their new life in the new world becomes short-lived. Their married life gets broken and their dreams get shattered. Amina's strange experience in the first world is a striking example of many wives who travel as appendages with their husbands. However, for women to travel to west as independent individuals is not so easy too. The protagonist of the story 'What Good Times We Had' fails to secure a Visa to go to Canada or North America just because she is unmarried. "If she wanted to remain abroad she had to get married." (Vassanji 1992 92). But on the other hand, her younger siblings, whom she helped to go abroad, went for studies and stayed on. Having failed in all her attempts to fly abroad, she finally drives herself to the death. This story shows the ill-treatment given to Asian women, and their problems in just acquiring a visa. Many South Asians (especially women) at that time were the victims of this political turmoil in Tanzania and in other East African countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. This trauma of political turmoil would appear to be the convincing force behind "the Urge to leave" – a central theme carried out by almost every story in the collection *Uhuru Street.*

While the urge to leave remains a central theme in Vassanji's first short story collection, his second collection displays a nostalgia of women in the first world, lingering between the thoughts about homeland and new land cultures. While those women who were fortunate enough to get married to men with good fortune moved towards the west, others who could not make it remained back in politically torn lands of African continent. Ramju's sister in the story 'What Good Times We Had' of *Uhuru Street* is one such unfortune woman, but for all her good deeds and believing attitude. Contrary to the above, Anardhalla in the story 'The Girl On The Bicycle', Farida[4] in the story 'She With Bill And George', Farida in the story 'Farida', Shirin in the story 'When She Was Queen', Fatima in the story 'Dear Khatija' of *Elvis, Raja* represent the affluent women who were fairly successful in getting married to prosperous men, and traveled to the west.

Thus, in both the short story collections, Vassanji depicts the lives of third world/South Asian diasporic women[5] and gender roles in the diasporia. It is in this context, the implicit formation of Gender in Diaspora needs to be understood in Vassanji's second short story collection *Elvis, Raja.* Although *Elvis, Raja* was published more than a decade after *Uhuru Street,* the central themes such as thinking about home in the new land (especially while living in the west), adherence of homeland cultures, preservation of traditions etc, which are carried forward from the first short story collection, suggest an unbroken continuity between both the collections.

Elvis, Raja is a collection of twelve stories. It was first published in 2005 under the title *When She Was Queen.*[6] However, when it was published in India in 2006, the same collection appeared under a different title *Elvis, Raja.*[7] Both the titles When She Was Queen (2005) and Elvis Raja (2006) reflect two stories mentioned in the collection. Both the stories are set in Toronto, and talk about Indian immigrants but of different types. While the former talks only about the East Africans of Indian descent, the later has a double narration of East African Indian descent as well as Indians who directly migrated to the West. Rustam Mehta (Rusty) from Bombay and Diamond from Nairobi in the story 'Elvis, Raja' become friends in New York during their graduation. Both were ardent supporters of Black Panther movement[8] during their student days. And they decide to marry only white girls not American or black girls, as the narrator puts it, "Why not just American girls or even black girls, since we so ardently supported the Black Panthers? But we came from the colonies and white is what we had to have" (Vassanji 2006 122). However, their wish does not become a reality in the later days of their lives. Diamond marries Susan, the daughter of Alfred Mendelsohn – the owner of a large book store in the City. Diamond is a frequent visitor to Mendelsohn's book store. On seeing Susan helping her father in the shop on one occasion, Diamond's visits to the book store became more frequent. Both began discussing about concerts, and it is on one such concert discussions on Ravi Shankar that their romantic life affair takes a definite shape. The Narator's description leaves no doubt in considering Susan's family as an Indian one. Although their English names sometimes create confusion in the reader's mind in deciding their identity, cremation of Susan after her death and description of blackness of her hair are some clear illustrations, which convince a reader to presume Susan's family to be

of Indian origin. Rusty also marries Vina, an Indian girl whom he brings from Bombay. To put that whole incident in Vina's own words, He came to Bombay from States, looking for a bride. I had to approve him, of course. I quite liked him. I wanted to go to America like all young people and he meant freedom and was quite exotic, you know. He was a real catch. He had just been a year here, in Greenfield (Vassanji 2006 151). This incident, when put to a vigorous analysis, would reveal more than a marriage between the third and first world prospects. Vina remains to be the best illustration in the entire collection of how Indian girls get attracted towards those men who return from abroad in search of a bride. The incident in 'Elvis, Raja' also explains the limitations of third world women to go alone to the first world and settle there even if they desire and are capable enough for the voyage. More than often, they are permitted to go abroad only as appendages for men. Under such circumstances, even if they cross the borders and enter the first world with full of anxiety and enthusiasm, the roles they are supposed to perform do not change drastically. As is the case with Vina, their roles are restricted to those of house wives.

Ali Jadhavji and Naagji in the story 'The Expected One' also come to India to look for a bride as Rusty did in 'Elvis, Raja.' Ali Jadhavji finds one, but Naagji gets caught in the spiritual, supernatural and superstitious elements of a village - the home town of his parents and becomes the father of Rahim. Finally, Nagji had to leave for Toronto with Rahim instead of a bride for whom he has come down to India.

The women who get married to the men from abroad are mostly poor, and lead a life of poverty. The seventeen year old virgin whom Ali Jadhavji marries is one such little educated, poverty-stricken girl in India. When an immigrant comes looking for a bride, it is a good opportunity for the parents of a girl, who are otherwise left with no option but to pay huge sum of dowry. Girls are readily given and freely sent abroad without even a second thought of their return. The utmost concern for them is the fulfilment of parental "Dharma" of getting their daughters married at a right age. For Indians either at home or abroad, marriage for a woman is an auspicious and inevitable duty, which her parents have to discharge in their lifetime. As young narrator and Shirin's only son puts it, "But as the saying went, even a half a husband, a one-eyed one, or a lame one, for example, was better than none at all" (Vassanji

2006 7). Vassanji captures the realities attached to Indian life and puts them in his writings with precision.

> A long time ago Diamond and Rusty had arrived, shy freshmen, one from Nairobi the other from Bombay, to study in New York. But the world was on fire and soon there they were in long hair and new jeans, screaming, 'of the pigs!' with all the other students protesting against the Vietnam War and 'Ho Ho Ho! Chi minh!' yet back in Elvis-postered late in the evenings, there would be Rusty, behind his desk completing his homework, his idol's songs playing on the stereo. One night an angry student radical clad in boots stormed in-while Elvis sang about a Chicago ghetto-and vented rage on Rusty's precious record collection, flinging it down on the floor, stamping on the black vinyl discs like they were cockroaches until they cracked. Grief-stricken Rusty shed many tears, and the following days scoured the city for all those old LPs and EPs he had lost (Vassanji 2006 121).

It is this passion for Elvis, which made him the pioneer in Elvis Studies and in his criticism. In fact, he seems to have developed a sort of madness in considering himself to be the pioneer in Elvis Studies. He collects bits and pieces of all available Elvis' objects, and has a museum in memory of him at his house. Rusty uses a planchette[9] to communicate with Elvis. Instead of calling Elvis as the King he addresses him as Raja[10] in a typical Indian style. Vasanji's conscious act of publishing his short collection under the present title in India seems to be audience-oriented effort. His changed title in India has become more attractive than otherwise would probably have been.

In the Story 'Elvis, Raja', Rusty presents Elvis as the radical figure, and considers him as the living legend. The Elvis Religion, which Rusty was so passionate to teach, appears as prototype of a universal religion – the combination of beliefs. Rusty draws his notions from the literature which Elvis himself has produced during his lifetime. He reads Elvis as a man for the poor and the oppressed, as a sympathizer of the backward sections of any Society. Elvis' movies against poverty, racism and

colonialism inspire Rusty, probably because of which, he decides to teach him as a distinct mode of protest. Rusty draws a comparison between Elvis Raja and a renowned singer in Bombay who sang "Oh-oh-oh meri bebi doll? During 1960s" (Vassanji 2006 123). For him, the singer in Bombay was a Indian Elvis. Rusty's attachment to India can be demonstrated in two prominent ways: First, is comparing Elvis with an Indian singer of the same era and second, is belief in the system of planchette, an oracle, which is believed to help talk to the spirits and the dead. His unshakable faith in Elvis may also lie in his conviction that Elvis had Jewish, Native Indian and African ancestry.

Explaining his Elvis collection to Diamond, Rusty says,

> I have a dream----don't laugh, please----a Dream that in a few decades perhaps half a century-----Elvis will be at the centre of a new world religion that will contain all the other religions. He speaks to so many people from all backgrounds and ages- even in different languages. What was Jesus when he started out? Elvis is much more. And look at the condition of the world today-the hunger and the greed ... wars and massacres ... all the intolerance ... now more than ever we need Elvis. Have you noticed the letters of his name can be rearranged to read: LIVES? (Vassanji 2006 149).

Diamond, an East African-Indian who is settled in Toronto, is another prominent character in the Story 'Elvis, Raja.' Susan, his beloved wife, gets infected with AIDS under dramatic circumstances. She is a well-qualified woman with a Degree in Philosophy. She wanted to work on Spinoza for her doctorate. But under financial compulsions, she took up an employment at Ontario's Ministry of Culture. It is this employment that brought her closer to Payal, An Indian dancer and a gay. Christopher, a wealthy, twenty years senior partner to Payal, dies of HIV/AIDS. It is an intimate relationship with Henry, an Indian and a close friend of Christopher, through which Susan too buys HIV/AIDS for herself. Her relationship with Henry, however, doesn't appear to have created any mutual antagonism in her married life with Diamond. Diamond too gives himself up to her, which she receives with honest confession and humility. When the doctor Berger and the nurse Cameron suspect

Diamond for her infection, she quickly comes to his rescue, and nods "No," disapproving their suspicion. Two decades of their married life, however, goes without even a single child. Susan's argument in opposition to having children is too modest. She is successful in convincing Diamond using a popular proposition that the world is full of poor and under-nourished children, and that it is better to adopt someone from the third world and treat him/her as their own child. This, she argues, would help make a better world. Her fear of having children may be partly because of her younger sister Marian's death in childhood. But Alfred Mendelsohn is the most unhappy man because of Susan's deliberate choice of avoiding child birth. He impatiently asks, "Give me a grandchild, producing heirs is a sacred duty to God! to humanity! Life is a gift, give it to someone," to which Susan replies, "dad, I'm not a factory for producing children; There are enough children in the world" (Vassanji 2006 132). Although Diamond has never taken a stiff decision to convince Susan in her lifetime, he too feels after her death that they could have had a child, who would have remained as a symbol of their love and reminded him of their long, lived conjugal relationship. The inner feelings of Susan, Mendelsohn and Diamond point out third world aspirations of a home full of children. While Susan wanted to adopt someone from the third world, probably having her homeland India in mind, Mendelsohn and Diamond wanted Susan to have a child of her own, which according to them would have probably been the fulfillment of her "Mathru Dharma."[11] Aspiring for children, both Mendelsohn and Diamond also appear to have been displaying their faith in a typical notion of producing heirs as an act of female emancipations. Love and memory are the human sentiments often used for imposing cultural stigmas and beliefs upon women either at home or abroad. These sentiments, however, seem to be more effective on third world diasporic women in the first world than at home. Educated women like Susan try to justify their opposition to such cultural impositions through political explanations. Her interest to have a doctorate on Spinoza, her in-depth analytical power in Philosophy like Schopenhauer (1788-1860)[12] and Solomon[13] and her discussions on lectures, music, etc with Diamond, all point to the fact that Susan is undoubtedly an intelligent woman. But when faced with such socio-cultural questions as whether to have children or not, she doesn't dare to put confidence in herself to justify her argument. Rather, she is convinced that the existing political world view would be the only better option to win over her male kinsmen. This might precisely be why she takes up the question of world's poor and

hungry children each time either her father or husband asks her to have children. Even this nominal resistance which Susan could successfully offer to protect her reproductive choice wouldn't have been possible even for an educated woman at back home.

Whatsoever justification one might offer about individual rights, whether it is for men or women, however, Diamond's situation sounds quite sympathetic because all his life with Susan was spent in reading Schopenhauer, listening to Beethoven (1770-1827)[14] and the Song of Solomon. Eventually, these events made him depressed even after her death. Now for him, the world is quite empty, nothing left to signify his past life except invisible imaginations which he keeps to himself.

Every time someone asks Diamond about Susan's death, his reply is never direct. More particularly, he is not interested in discussing her HIV/AIDS infection. Rather, he wrongly reveals to others that cancer is responsible for her death. Although Diamond's deliberate attempt in hiding his late wife's HIV infection can be favoured on the ground of his admiration towards her personality, that alone doesn't appear to be a convincing cause. His aspirations for a new prospective bride cannot be fully dismissed. He seems to be fully prepared to come out of his loneliness when presented with such an opportunity. When Vina informs Diamond of her sister, whom she describes as a beautician---and quite a beauty herself, his reaction is remarkably different than one might think of his characterization in the story till then: "that must make me a Frankenstein, Diamond thinks glumly. Yes, The sister is pretty,though a little too tall and forlorn looking and she doesn't hold a candle to you my dear," he thinks looking at Vina.

Although Diamond's attachment to Susan cannot be questioned, his thirst for a woman after her death is also equally true. He is found revealing his inner feelings unconsciously in each private conversation he has with Vina. Vina takes conscious note of meanings hidden behind his flattered speech, and tries to avoid them without actually hurting him. In one such conversations, Diamond comments, "Does Rusty know how fortunate he is, you are the most beautiful woman I've ever met," to which Vina replies, "Where did you learn to make such flattering comments?" (Vassanji 2006 129)

Despite being able to grasp Diamond's intentions in just a few days of his stay at their house, Vina appears to have firmly decided to get her sister Rina married with him. The whole family stands with her in this decision. Although there seems nothing much to be pointed out about a decision to give a widow as second wife to someone who lost his first wife, there are two complex issues to be sorted out in the present context. First, Vina's decision to get her widowed sister remarried reflects the ability to act in accordance with her rational thinking. Had Vina been placed in the third world, her ability to exercise control over her own decisions would have been met with a stiff resistance. Like late Susan, who remained successful throughout her life in convincing her husband and father about her indifferent decision of not having children, Vina too stands at the positive side in so far as getting her family's initial approval for her sister's remarriage with Diamond, although that never becomes a reality. Second, Vina's firmness and assertive character do not appear to be completely free from the cultural baggage she brings with her into the diaspora. For instance, one of the prime reasons based on which she gets convinced to get her divorced sister remarried is her state of childlessness at the time of divorce. As a third world woman considers herself and is considered by others, she gets fully qualified for remarriage as long as she is a single woman. Again, she can be considered single not only in the event of either her husband's death or a legal declaration of divorce, but also provided she doesn't bear children at the time of such marital break-up. Vina is not fully free from such a self-imposed stigma. The first thing she mentions shortly after showing her sister's photograph to Diamond is that Rina is divorced but without children. Vina's brief sketch of Rina, her sister – first, a short description of her beauty and then, a confessional statement of her state of divorce without children – reveals a particular mindset which an average third world woman has in mind while thinking about female remarriage. In the example given above, Vina's attempt to convince Diamond in favour of Rina for marriage is beyond a simple desire to get her sister married. The way she tries to convince Diamonds, reveals her cultural consciousness. This could precisely be why she is quick to inform Diamond of Rina as a single woman without children. Vina's cultural consciousness in the first world, therefore, oscillates between two worlds which represent varied social structures. This seems to be the dominant lifestyle of any third world diasporic woman, especially in the first world. Most of the stories in *Elvis, Raja* stand as testimony to this fact.

Shireen, Rusty's only daughter mentioned in the story, is shown to have the personal traits of her own. Unlike her Mother, who is a mixture of east and the west, Shireen is described to be extremely proactive in her thoughts. Rarely spoken, she does what she thinks. When Elvis, Raja decides that Diamond has to stay for some more days at home, Diamond remains helpless. Unable to convince anybody in Rusty's family; he goes to bed early that night; and here is Shireen who comes with his car keys, informing him that enough space has already been made for his car to move without any hurdle, and that he can escape before nobody wakes up in the morning. Although everybody recognizes Diamond's inconvenience in staying more at their house, it is only Shireen who recognizes the need to give respect to their guest's individual preference at the expense of crossing the traditional boundaries set by the family structures. On another occasion, when the grandmother is mumbling to herself something, Shireen understands her feelings and responds quickly on her behalf, "'Ok, Ma, Raja, tell Ma how is Manek her husband and my grandfather" (Vassanji 2006 153). Rusty replies, "He is well and sends greetings" "Well, we know he's doing well where he is. He's reborn as a little girl in a fabulously rich household in Mysore," but she doesn't mind to question her father either. "Isn't that what Raja told us the other time?" (Vassanji 2006 154) Shireen asks her father.

Homosexuality in the case of Payal, Christopher and Henry, projected identity often shown in Vina's activities, the place of Indian art and culture among diasporic communities in the first world, one's own intellectual love for god etc. are some of the carefully articulated central themes narrated in 'Elvis, Raja.' Of course, homosexuality finds its expression even in other stories in the collection. Its form depicted in 'Farida' is particularly important for it assumes a socio-familial structure.

'Farida' is a briefer version of a short story woven with straightforward description of a small family. Farida and her unnamed husband, who is also the narrator of the story, are blessed with two children – a son and a daughter. They fell in love during their university days, got married later, and moved to Canada after Ashik's[15] birth. Ashik has a younger sister, who is born after their parents moved to Canada. Farida and her husband suffer the initial shock one day when Ashik's School teacher invites both of them and informs them that their son is a gay. Mr. Turner's information that their only son is a gay creates a cultural panic in their minds. Despite

being herself a teacher and a university graduate, Farida seems to be almost unprepared to accept her male child's gayness. To explain her reaction in the narrator's words, "observing our impatience, he began to speak of sexual preferences and slowly the point of the interview began to dawn on me; it required the full brunt of the revelation before Farida realized what was being said: your son is gay. She looked at me as if to say something is wrong with my hearing today, or is this man crazy?" (Vassanji 2006 216). Finally, Farida accepts to live with the homosexuality of her son, but with a belief that homosexuals are intellectual beings. W. H. Auden, a poet and Benjamin Britton are some of the history-making gay figures who readily come into Farida's mind each time she thinks of her son. The reference point of these intellectual personalities often serves both Farida and her husband to feel themselves satisfied, and treat their son as a sensible man. In their opinion, although Ashik is neither a poet nor an artist, being a geologist in Alberta, he is a fairly successful man. They combine both their disappointment and excitement together and try to derive comfort out of it. Such a comfort as put into their own words is: "I am proud of my son that we had a son. Only it seems one day just he rode away into the sunset, into another mode of existence. That's life"(Vassanji 2006 217). The consolation of Ashik's parents appears to be more of a compulsion and an outward acceptance than a fullfledged realization. The dual projection of their son also gets reflected in their fragmented consciousness.

When they happen to meet Shelly, the gay partner of their son, they accept the couple with a smile without much hesitation. Farida leaves with a smile and signals to her husband to leave them to themselves. An introduction of this particular event, with Farida smiling once for all, appears to be a deliberate expression on the part of Vassanji to suggest a third world woman's acceptance of gayness of her son.

Lesbianism, another form of Homosexuality, is depicted in the Story 'Dear Khatija.' ' It is in 'Dear Khatija', that Vassanji allows Lakshmi as the only female narrator in his whole collection of *Elvis, Raja*. Lakshmi begins by peeping into her mother Madhu's past by looking carefully at the letters she has written to her "Pyari"[16] Khati throughout her life. Khatija is a neighbour and the childhood best friend of Madhu. But their childhood bond couldn't last until their days of youth. The break-up of their relationship remains as dramatic as the history of the South-Asian

sub-continent itself. It was the geo-political partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 that brought about the physical partition of Madhu and Khatija. Once, after Khatija's family, like many million other families, is packed first to Bombay, and then to Pakistan from there, that Khatija becomes a living fiction for Madhu. Even after realizing that Khatija has an untraceable address then, Madhu still keeps on addressing every significant moment of her life to her, but in a diary that never gets posted. Vassanji's choice of writing 'Dear Khatija' in an epistolary genre appears to be his preference to narrate the political partition of India through a psycho-personal experience. The sub-title given to the story and a chronological sequence of Mahdu's letters suggest a typical narration not only of partition but also of the drastic impact it left on the minds of people living beyond both the borders. From Madhu's letters, it can be suggested that the partition had left a severe impact especially on the minds of those children who lost their friends on the other side of the border. The severity of this impact is felt by them throughout their life, as it happened with Madhu.

Although not stated explicitly in the story, certain events which Madhu has documented in her letters addressed to Khatija compel a reader to suspect their relation closer to lesbian feelings in their childhood. Madhu's first letter dated April 22, 1947 at Amritsar, Punjab reads:

> "What happened, my darling, my loving loving Khatija, I want to hold you in my arms and cry with you and rock you- do you remember the way we cried each other to sleep when my brother Om died? Save for one wail, my love" (Vassanji 2006 172).

In her letter dated April 25 1947, Madhu recalls Khatija saying one day, "I so much want to give my milk to someone and I said, come, I will be your baby. I feel like that now" (Vassanji 2006 174). Although The deep abiding friendship between Madhu and Khatija finds its expression in Madhu's writings, the interpretation of expressed events speaks something beyond a mere friendship, allowing us to suspect it to be a lesbian relationship. Of course, Lakshmi, the narrator of 'Dear Khatija', never takes a risk of interpreting Madhu's letters in this particular fashion, probably because of her preoccupation with the observation of other events of her mother's life. And in another sense, unlike 'Farida' which is set in the first world Canada where

homosexuality is readily accepted, Vassanji might have taken a cautious care and avoided a controversial discussion on lesbianism freely in a story set in the third world India. The cultural contexts in which stories are set and issues discussed become very significant. In another letter written on May 21, 1947 Madhu writes,

> But listen, pyari, I went inside the house while the police and government people were there and I took your green dupatta with the gold spots; you left it behind and it was your favourite, they let me take it, it still carries your sweet smell, I would know it anywhere, in any corner of the world, and after a hundred years. I also extracted your notebook in which you would write poems. So I have your writing and your words and your love. Will you return Khati, when times are better? (Vassanji 2006 175).

Madhu preserves Khatija's green dupatta[17] like a sacred gift left behind by her closest friend. It remains as a source of comfort during times of her grief, a sacred thread in times of ruin and a golden reminder throughout her life. When her first child dies shortly after birth, Madhu wears the same dupatta and offers her prayers in the temple for at least one son with full life. Madhu believes that her children – Mohan and Lakshmi – are the divine blessings paid in answer to her prayers offered in the green dupatta. She preserves her sacred cloth until the last auspicious occasion in her life when she wears it at the time of meeting Khatija at Lakshmi's house in San Fransisco, California. That was a long awaited meeting which united two childhood friends after four-and-a-half decades of their partition. Their initial conversation didn't appear to be as much exciting as Lakshmi had expected. Even in such a remarkable meeting arranged by grown-up daughters, both the mothers seemed to have felt that they owned nothing of their own anymore to share, except the exchange of formal greetings, few words about personal life bound up with family matters, many pains and few pleasures. Their tragic meeting arranged many thousand miles away from their original homelands is a remarkable event of displacement. Political boundaries of their countries guarded by military Jawans never allowed even a possibility to know each other's existence, although both of them lived at a distance of twenty miles from each other. As Madhu expresses her grief in her letter dated September 1983, "A crow can fly from your place to mine, yet we could not shout to each other across the border" (Vassanji 2006 190).

Madhu is depicted as a traditional Indian woman, who dare not even pronounce her husband's name in full. Introducing her husband in her letter dated March 20, 1948, Madhu writes:

> He is not a prince, a nawab, or a raja, and he is not a dashing actor, not a handsome army officer. He's a government babu in the office for resettlement of refugees. The family is from Jullundur, father a teacher; not rich but his job is good. His name- but I dare not utter it! Let us say the first sound is the same as that of Sita's husband and it ends in sh. That should do, you know that for me he must always be he. He is not very tall, two finger widths more than me, but he's very fair, and he has a wide face with pointed chin, with large nose and big ears-a little like an elephant! Go on laugh all you will at Madhu's choice! Yes his name does rhyme with Ganesh (Vassanji 2006 181).

None of Madhu's letters carries even a single complaint about her husband, children and family. Unlike the third world diasporic women who enjoy a relative freedom in the first world, the women back home are made to adhere to the strict norms of their families. Vina in the story 'Elvis, Raja' is the best example of a third world woman, who can exercise control over her own decisions without over-interference from the family members.

The last letter by Madhu dated Amritsar, Punjab August, 1992 shows her conviction that woman always belongs to the other. The "other" is always a husband, children and the family which includes even their in-laws. In her last letter after coming back from San Francisco, Madhu writes to Khatija about the sternness in her expression. "I sensed a hurt in you, dear, I can't tell where from, But I would have broken through that sternness, Khati, found that soft inside, given time. But now we belong to others, and you to many more than 1" (Vassanji 2006 196), probably referring to her twelve children.

The Story 'She with Bill and George' also has a reference to letters corresponded between parted friends. This story describes the friendship amongst three youngsters from three different racial communities- white, black and brown.

Farida, a brown, is the only woman among them. Bill Songa, an American and white and George Kasore Meet, a black from Mbeya, Tanzania are the other two male partners in the group. Three of them are teachers in a school at St. Andrew's the countryside of Mbeya. They become friends despite their racial distinctions. Three of them go out for a stroll and chat freely with one another. Although Farida loves George, she cannot express it to him because of her engagement with Shamshu, a man whom she knows for so many years. Shamshu is also a teacher in a school in Dar Es Salaam. George too loves Farida and once he invites her to his flat for a cup of tea after their lunch. Farida follows George without hesitation, presuming that Bill too is invited for the tea. But after George's gesture, Bill leaves them alone and goes away. Although she doesn't want others to form a wrong impression about their relationship, she readily accepts George's offer without Bill. Having finished the tea, George takes the opportunity. "My dear" He says, "I love you, Farida" (Vassanji 2006 205) without any hesitation. It is an obvious shock for an Indian woman born in East Africa and brought up in an Indian cultural environment. But she regains herself from the shock within a few moments, and feels that her own feelings have been articulated by him. Unable to control, George holds her arms and kisses her, to which Farida's reaction seems to be quite calm and dignified. She pülls herself always from him, trying to explain that she has already got engaged, and leaves the house immediately thereafter. But the next day in the afternoon, she gives a patient explanation to George that she has committed herself to a man whom she has known for long. George still sticks to his own desires, and tells her that he loves her most. Trying to find out a convincing way, Farida articulates that she too loves him, but in her own way. George responds quickly, trying to know whether that love meant as if he were a plant or any other creature on the earth. But Farida's contention remains the same, with a request to him not to spoil their relationship for silly and impossible reasons.

George's final question seems to be particularly important. This time beyond silly reasons, he asks, "To mean my being black has nothing to do with it?" (Vassanji 2006 206). Although it was difficult to answer his question, she says "no." But that doesn't seem to be so easy an answer though she was able to provide it quite consciously. She recalls later:

> Did I ask myself what exactly I felt for him... what he had asked me to risk, what that would have entailed... did I wonder afterwards whether I simply played it safe, was unwilling to scorch myself in a passion... that perhaps my decision was to live/not fully but longer? How easily I decided to forget him, them both. How easily we cast aside, walk away from voices, from love, from friendship, from parts of our lives... and how desperately we try to grasp them when they are beyond reach. George, you'd never been happy, I knew that perhaps it was that unhappiness I shrank from. But no, I just didn't have it in me simply to fly away the other way, from my flock, they were my golden cage, my security (Vassanji 2006 207).

Therefore, it is Farida's circumstances which compel her to hide her love for George. As an Indian born East African, she doesn't seem to be prepared to give up her traditions so easily. In Farida's case, religion, race and culture stand as a barrier against her marrying George.

During Shamshu's visit to Mbeya, he gets embarrassed with Farida's closeness with Bill, who is found always around with his jokes, friendly suggestions and questions. Shamshu asks her as to why can't they get married, and apply to go to Canada. She readily agrees, and leaves the place with Shamshu. But she doesn't forget to convey her only last wishes to George before she leaves. She rushes to George's flat and says, "I have come to say good bye". George stands up from the sofa and replies, "Good bye, I wish you a happly life" "you too..." (Vassanji 2006 207) She leaves, choking.

It is almost two decades after their departure, that Farida writes to Bill's house address in 1999. She herself doesn't know why she is writing after so many years, but that her compulsions are making her to rethink the past and recreate the lost relationships.

In her letter dated November 6, 1999, she writes,

> Dear Bill, I don't know why I am writing this letter to you... I simply had this compulsion to do something unusual,

> courageous... foolish? I felt like grabbing my fistful of my life that so rapidly passed away, relive clearly those years... no, not quite like that, but a compulsion to touch the past again! Do you know what I mean? (Vassanji 2006 201).

Farida, who hides in herself her love for George, and gets married to a committed man, seems to have undergone a notable transformation once after entering the first world. Looking for her old friends and trying to bring out her hidden love for George, Farida becomes more courageous than a third world woman. Although the compulsions for her to transform as a courageous diasporic woman are not mentioned in the story, it is more understandable that she is in need of a greater consultation and comfort by the time she writes to her old friends, trying to recall her past with them. In an effort to make a comforting room for herself, therefore, she negotiates with her culture, giving a careful thought to the past.

The last paragraph of the story reveals Shamshu's wishful desire to know the other side of her life. And to his curiosity, he finds a novel containing the name of George Kasore and his picture on the top. Three letters from Bill Songa kept in the novel added more to his curiosity. As promised to himself long before, Shamshu gets an opportunity to discover the other part of Farida's life at the end. This last incident shows not only the unfaithfulness of a man over his own wife who is supposed to be treated as equal, but also reveals his in-built control over the female partner. Celebrating his discovery as a success, he takes pride in justifying: "Offerings to my curiosity, for me to discover a part of her light as I promise myself I will" (Vassanji 2006 209). In fact, Shamshu's success in discovering his wife's past life proves the fact that a third world diasporic woman never has a private life of her own. This is what exactly Madhu in 'Dear Khatija' feels. A woman belongs to others, the moment she gets married, losing her privacy completely. The same fact is also evident in another heart-breaking Story in the collection 'When She Was Queen'.

"My father lost my mother one evening in a final round of gambling at the poker table" (Vassanji 2006 1) is a touching start the unnamed narrator gives to his Story 'When She Was Queen.' Rashid Jafer is a drifting salesman at a hunting store in Nairobi before he moves to Kisumu in Kenya. Rashid and Shirin, his wife, had two

daughters – Razia and Habibeh – and a son, whose name is not mentioned. It is their unnamed son who narrates the story based on the family input he receives from his two sisters and mother. He decides to explore his biological father twenty years after his birth. He thought Rashid to be his real father, and was very fond of him before he came to know that the whole story was all too different.

In the story 'When She Was Queen,' the author introduces another rebellious third world diasporic woman character, Shirin, in the first world. Shirin is brought up by her aunt- mother's sister after the death of her parents. Being an orphan, she is given no choice of her own in her marriage. Her husband Rashid is a drifting salesman in Nairobi, who later shifted to Kisumu, Kenya after marriage. Kisumu is ruled by Johnnies, who stroll in the town with their wives every Friday, and finally come to Rose hotel in the evening. On hearing about Rashid's predicament, John Chacha offers him a job as a manager at Rose hotel. As was the tradition on every Friday, Rashid has to supply them victuals, libations and gambling tables for Johnnies. Their group includes: John Chacha, Ambalal, Hassam Mukhi, Dr. Patel and Dr. Singh, the only cancer specialist in the town. Although just an employee, Rashid too gets included in the group later for his western mannerisms combined with his wife's beauty. Apart from their weekly celebrations on every Friday, they also meet at houses of anyone of them on a Saturday once in eight weeks. It is one such eighth Saturday, which leaves Shirin's life on a plane of rebellion and self-recursive act. This time, the party is hosted by John Chacha, who too plays his part in the impending game.

Like on any eighth Saturday family meet, Shirin and Rashid drive towards John Chacha's house. And Dr. Singh with one of his African interns, Dr. Patel, Ambalal and of course, John Chacha are already present there. With Khanoo Chachi's preparation for her departure along with two children to Mombasa to visit her parents, the event becomes more significant.

As always happens at the end of every family gathering, the gambling among competators begins with its own hiccups that night. Like never before, John Chacha begins losing continuously in the first few rounds of the game. As if his inner confidence gave him a magic strength, John Chacha gets ready to bid his house - the

Alishaan mansion on the gambling table. He quiets Khanoo Chachi who tries to alarm him, "you can't" (Vassanji 2006 12). With quite a regret, Rashid asks, "Don't I only wish I had something of value to bid against that?" (Vassanji 2006 12) to which John Chacha quickly replies, "You have! If I have a palace, you have the queen of Kisumu! You can do better than the pandavas,[18] surely" (Vassanji 2006 12). He continued further, "Bid her, if you win, this Alishaan mansion, this Taj Mahal of Lake Province is yours, for you and your Mumtaz to move into. If not she is mine for a night" (Vassanji 2006 12). An emotional Khanoo Chachi in her despair, begins crying. "What is he saying, this man, have some shame for God's sake" (Vassanji 2006 12). The final bid is agreed, with Rashid saying, "All right, my wife on the table" Rashid quickly stared at Shirin, standing behind him with a smiling face. Interestingly, Shirin doesn't utter even a single syllable, as if she is nowhere in the game. For an African intern, the guest of the night, the whole game seems confusing. But Patel's wife interferes, and offers her own presumed explanation that it is nothing more than a joke. In fact, It is Dr. Singh's scornful look at Shirin which changes the whole event, rather the game on the gambling table. Shirin behaves at the gambling table like a traditional Indian wife who is taught not to speak against her husband's wish. When Rashid loses the game, women around subdue Khanoo Chachi, convincing her that it is all a joke. Leaving the host's house Ambalal reminds Rashid, "Well, you lost your wife. You have to watch this Johnny, he pulls the pants off you if you give him the chance" (Vassanji 2006 13).

Contrary to her behaviour at the gambling table, Shirin becomes rebellious after reaching home. She fights with Rashid, "So you simply gambled me away. Like this," (Vassanji 2006 13). Rashid's regretful reply,

> I was a fool, darling, but it was for you that I was tempted!
> And so you sold away my dignity
> You could have stopped me! You could have objected!
> We were all watching you to see what you would do! You accepted an insult to your wife! You sold me away! Well, if my husband thinks me dispensable enough a commodity...
> We were all a bit tipsy, John especially. I'll call him tomorrow, tell him it was all a joke. He should apologise. Come on, I am sorry..." (Vassanji 2006 13)

doesn't seem to put a full stop to their continued quarrel. The next day, Rashid tries to convince John Chacha but without success. John Chacha sticks to his point in justifying himself that it is not at all a joke. He never jokes while doing business and gambling. Finally, he puts his assertion that he has won his wife for a night, and sends his car for Shirin in the evening as he had promised. As she does every evening, she dresses herself up in a dignified style and the finest manner, and sits into the car. The narrator of the story is born exactly after nine and a half months of that drastic night.

Shirin appears to have recaptured her boldness once after she is gambled out by her husband. Shirin and Dr. Singh, fall in love afterwards. When John Chacha leaves her unmolested, she calls Dr. Singh directly to pick her up from his house. Even after moving to Toronto, she continues to exchange letters with him. Shirin is more frequent in their correspondence than Dr Singh. Rashid knows about Shirin's affair, and that he is not the biological father of her son. The moment he bids her on the poker table, he knows for sure that she no longer belongs to him. Ever since then, Rashid carries with him the sadness of humiliation he acquired at the gaming table, and loses his active life completely. Shirin's decision at John Chacha's house is undoubtedly a rebellious act, against the tradition with which she had been brought up.

Anaar Dhalla, the protagonist of the story 'The Girl On The Bicycle', always desires to live a different life, and does so at Dar es Salaam first and then at Toronto where she gets settled with her husband Amir, who is fifteen years elder to her. The Mukhi, a sort of father for the Ismaili community, narrates the story of Anaar. With the sudden death of her father at an early age and the subsequent remarriage of her mother who left for Uganda and Congo afterwards, Anaar becomes an orphan. She is brought up in the family of her Father's younger brother in the later part of her life. Although separated from her own parents, she was well taken-care of by her uncle and aunt. Being a rebel from her very childhood, she knew how to get her wishes fulfilled. She always had a life of her own. She is the only Cyclist in the city Dar es Salaam, a cyclist girl amidst stuffy minds of African and Indian youngsters. Although the bike is bought for the use of her brother, it is she who uses it most.

While returning from the Drama practice one evening as usual, her cycle crosses over the Jamhuri Street and enters the Uhuru Street, where she is subjected to her first humiliation in youth. The preference she attached to the Uhuru Street, a residential area of Indians in the city, appeared to have been shattered to her utmost shame that evening.

Four Indian boys sitting at the edge of the pavement were making obscene remarks reciting "Ya Ali, Ya Ali" (Vassanji 2006 22) when her vehicle approaches them closer. For once, her speed fails to escape from an orange throw at her, coming with equal pace, which eventually becomes successful in breaking down the front wheel of her delicate cycle. A sucked orange piece thrown by one among those four street boys, although successful in damaging a front wheel, lags behind its real target. Anaar saves herself from falling down completely, and this time she is victorious in preserving her shame. Anaar firmly reacts to the mindless act of youngsters and asks, "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Don't you have mothers and sisters of your own?" (Vassanji 2006 23). Amir, a modest man in the city known to Anaar as Guli's smart Uncle, appears as a saving star before any further exchange takes place between the stiff-resistant bicycle girl and emotionally charged street boys. He warns the boys not to indulge in such shameless act thereafter, and asks the Whist playing men as to why even not one of them could come to her rescue, at which one of the men playing cards reacts, "What does she expect, wearing a skirt and riding a bicycle and at this time!" (Vassanji 2006 23). Amir Uncle replies with diligence, "that's the school uniform, don't you know that? In which world do you live? Take a close look at the calendar next time and check the year!" (Vassanji 2006 23). Another man in the game replies, "Keep her at home, she's of age." Amir Uncle drives Anaar home, admonishing her how dangerous it is it for a girl to return home late.

Ever since that haunting evening when Amir Uncle comes to save her, Anaar maintains a frequent contact with him, meeting him everywhere and going outings often. Working as a controller at the European firm of Twentsche Overseas Motors, Amir is a man of status and well received everywhere. Although Guli, Anaar and Amir Uncle make plans for many outings together, more than often, Guli fails to come, and it is only Anaar and Amir Uncle who go out as planned. Anaar always takes her cousin Azim with her as it is a usual practice for girls to take their little

brothers along with them. However, her Cousin is quiet almost as if he isn't present there all the time. The unabated relationship between Anaar and Amir Uncle continues for more than a year before it makes a sudden shift. Attending early morning mosque at 4:00 every day, having driving lessons with Amir Uncle on the seashore after the mosque, she experienced with Amir Uncle a life, which her guardian uncle and aunt couldn't have provided. It raised her hopes for having a house, a car and an individual living. Anaar along with Amir Uncle also goes to watch a popular play, a thrilling dance performance, office Christmas party, Tennis and Cricket matches. A bead necklace and a golden bangle are some of the additional gifts Guli presents to Anaar on Amir Uncle's behalf.

It was Mrs. Daya's gossipy news one day which alerts Anaar's aunt about Amir Uncle's relationship with Anaar. Anaar's aunt gathers all the information from Azim and warns Anaar to be careful in her relationship with Amir Uncle. Eventually, therefore, Anaar declines all invitations from Amir brought by her friend Guli. Unable to bear her refusal so easily, Amir follows her bicycle while she is returning from the school, and Anaar stops at the Odeon and gets into his car. When he expresses his love to her, Anaar is hesitant to accept him readily. She questions him as to why couldn't he express his intention before, doubting as if he tried to take advantage of her innocence all these days. However, she reconciles herself before they reach her Aunt's store. Amir drops her at the store and drives back without much talk. When her furious aunt tries to reason her out, she firmly replies that both of them are in love, and wish to get married. Her reply sounds quite strange both to her uncle and aunt, who get quite shocked. Her aunt retaliates, , "Don't be silly, he is old enough to be your father!" (Vassanji 2006 32). And the uncle adds that he studied with Amir, and he was two classes ahead of him. The aunt continues bluntly, "when you are forty he will be an elderly bapa of sixty, will he be able to satisfy you?" (Vassanji 2006 32). Being firm in her resolve, Anaar rejects every offer and advice given by her neighbours, girl friends and elders around. As an act of conciliation, there are two proposals brought to her of men in mid twenties, and she is promised her next holidays in Uganda. Complementing her beauty, Anaar's teenage friends try to put in the picture how young and beautiful she is, trying to enlighten that she could have her pick of husbands.

Unlike Anaar's family and friends, Amir's side is very positive about his choice. His mother who has a nursery school of her own, his two sisters – a teacher and a stennow – along with three other elders from his community, bring a formal proposal for marriage to Anaar's house. Insisting that age can never become a barrier for a couple ready to be united, and willing to live a life of their own, they try their bid to convince Anaar's family, listing out all the better qualities of Amir, and calling him a "gem." Amir's steno sister throws her final bow reminding their guardianship responsibility, "After all the girl is your trust and you should do what's in her interest, even though it may get difficult for you around the house once she's gone" (Vassanji 2006 34) which Anaar uses subsequently as an emotional weapon when her aunt and uncle try to prevail upon her. "If I were your own daughter, you wouldn't let me miss this golden opportunity to move up in life. You only need me here to help you around the house and the shop" (Vassanji 2006 34)., puts Anaar bluntly before her uncle and aunt, echoing almost in the similar tone of her would be sister-in-law.

Finally, Anaar succeeds in convincing uncle and aunt for her marriage with Amir. However, contrary to Anaar's hopes, the troubles do not appear to have found a solution even after her marriage union with Amir. The precious moments of her first night in that accidental hotel room, opted for because of its discount offer, leave Anar traumatized throughout her remaining life.

> At some point in their tentative foreplay she mounted him and took her pleasure. At the critical moment for her, her eyes fell upon the wall in front of her, saw a small bright spot some three fourths of the way up. The room was in partial darkness, a dim pervasive glow intruding into their privacy from the square courtyard outside, with its garden of roks and plants and large globe lights under which couples courted. It was, Anaar says, of that spot on the wall, a blink of light that quickly disappeared, leaving behind a speck to blend in with the other shadows in the room (Vassanji 2006 37).

It is that aperture through which Salim Damani, son of that hotel manager, steals away her womanhood. She carries with her that shame throughout her life. Unable to bear her emotional break-up at times, she insists to leave the place where her shame

couldn't be preserved and move abroad. She thinks that by moving away from the place, she can at least avoid Damani's face and his voyeurism.

Although a rebel from her childhood, Anaar begins hating herself, and loses activeness in life ever since when her privacy gets stolen. She and her husband work hard and establish a good reputation for themselves in Canada. As Anaar mightn't have expected, Damani's presence doesn't leave her even in Canada too. To her astonishment, Damani is now in Canada not only as an established wealthy man but also the respected elder of the community. But that hardly makes any indifference in her attitude towards him. Damani, on his part, relentlessly tries to keep himself closer to her whenever an opportunity comes into his hand. On one occasion, he manipulates things around on a mosque day, and shakes hands with Anaar. On another occasion, in a community picnic, he puts himself close behind her purposefully, after which she goes home and weeps for long.

The day for which Anaar has been waiting so long arrives on its appointed time, and the news about Damani's death is brought to her by Amir. It is this day, in fact, which recoups her with her defiant nature, bringing back rage in her thoughts of a revenge. Amidst everybody's sadness, Anaar's last anger finds its place for a revenge. She gathers all strength and spits on Damani's corpse.

From the above, it is understood that The Story 'The Girl on The Bicycle' depicts one of a unique courageous but very sensitive characters of a third world diasporic woman through Anar. She is depicted to have been always different in her thoughts and decisions. As an ultimate bid of her life in the first world, she even gets separated from twenty-three years of her married life with Amir and decides to stay alone. It is under one such lonely moments of her diversed life, she reveals her hidden past to one of her childhood friends, now Mukhi and a real-estate agent, who also helps her find a house for her to stay alone. But the Mukhi doesn't seem to have fully understood Anaar and the poignant moments of her gloomy past, which got hidden just in herself for so long. Explaining to Mukhiani his inability to fully grasp Anaar's emotional stage, he confesses,

> I look away, at the ceiling which is dark and in shadow, at the glory of lights that is Yonge Street down below. How Can I

> imagine what it meant to her that one scorching moment in her life of a tender raw nineteen year old girl back home, and what that moment did to all the moments of her life? But I feel a heavy sense of sadness in me, I cannot tell you quite why. And I also feel a hind of anger or bitterness, I know not where to direct it (Vassanji 2006 41).

Through the confessional statement quoted above, Vassanji seems to be trying to explain a man's inability to fully understood a woman's feelings in depth. The story, therefore, is woven from a feminist perspective, considering Anaar as a girl of rebellious nature and a woman of radical thoughts. The pre-eminent role of the Mukhi in any community in general and Ismaili community in particular, is also explained well in the story. Mukhi, as a community elder, is expected to come to the moral and physical aid of his community members, whenever required. He should know what one has in his/her mind, and keep them with himself without revealing them to others. Believed to be a mediator between God and Man, he is expected to attend to each dying member of his community and fulfill his/her desire. The role of the Mukhi, therefore, becomes vital for the Ismaili community. Given his peculiar responsibilities, the Mukhi is found sometimes confused about his obligations and personal preferences, oscillating himself between past memories and present images of life. Such bewilderment is quite evident in the present story 'The Girl on The Bicycle'.

'The Girl On The Bicycle', 'Her Two Husbands' and 'Last Rites' presented in Vassanji's Collection *Elvis, Raja* have been narrated by the same Mukhi, Shamshu. Shamshu Mukhi's confounding condition in 'Last Rites' is particularly interesting. Although the story 'Her Two Husbands' doesn't appear to have been told by Shamshu Mukhi, being a preceding story to 'Last Rites' almost with the same content, it can more or less be understood that it too is narrated by him. Yasmin Bharwani and her family are the central theme of both the stories. More than the sequence in which the stories are told, Shamshu Mukhi's friendship with Karim Bharwani suggest to a reader to justifiably presume Mukhi's narration of both the stories, which talk about Bharwani's life and his indifferent beliefs.

Karim and Yasmin meet each other for the first time at the history department of University of Toronto, where Yasmin gets appointed as a new assistant librarian and Karim has already been working as a professor by then. They both first fall in love and eventually get married. They have three children – two sons – Emil and Iqbal – and a daughter, Zuleikha. Although often opposed to faith and religion, Karim is considered rational in his thoughts and actions. Being sceptical, Karim develops alternative opinions to tradition, customs, and of course, to religion. Although not traditional in its strict sense, Yasmin has her own opinion about and faith in God, standing in quite opposition to her communist partner. As the Narrator of 'Her Two Husbands' puts it in his own words,

> They were all professionals, married to other professionals and businessmen and all observant community members a class Karim had contemptuously dismissed as the 'Markhamites' and 'Scarberians' suburbanites spending their nonworking hours on the highways and in mosque. He was so passionate in his beliefs, she simply went along with them because ultimately she didn't quite care as much and she wanted him happy. But she had her qualms and she had her guilt. She needed her God in small doses, like normal people (Vassanji 2006 82).

At a crucial juncture of their life, Karim's prolonged illness puts Yasmin in the kind of trouble she is unprepared to bear. When Shamshu and his wife arrive at the hospital to give chhanta to Karim at the request of Yasmin.[19] The communist Karim, in a slightly mocking tone and reacting to Shamshu and Farida's visit, contemptuously asks, "Mukhi and Mukhiani, So have you come to give me chhanta?" (Vassanji 2006 94). Karim accepts to take chhanta finally after a prolonged argument about forgiveness and Yasmin's convincing appeal to allow the first and the last religious act in his life. But Karim's acceptance of a religious rite to be performed in his life comes with a stiff condition, which he imposes equally on his wife, Mukhi and Mukhiani. Informing them of his decision once they have completed performing chhanta, Bharwani sternly proposes that he wishes his dead body to be cremated instead of being buried. His proposal for cremation after death, a practice quite contrary to their religious faith, puts three of them in a great quandary. As was almost

expected, Bharwani dies the very next day, pushing the dilemma he created to its highest climax. Yasmin calls Shamshu, asking his advice, in response to which he begins probing her, "What do you think you should do?" Yasmin remains confused whether to fulfill her dead husband's last wish or to follow the tradition haunting her at every moment. She replies to the Mukhi, "My conscience tells me to follow his wishes, you know I promised I would. But I don't know what's right. I don't want him to go to hell or some such place because of his arrogance. Is there a hell, Mukhisaheb?" (Vassanji 2006 96).

Shamshu calls up his classmates Jamal, Nanji, Alidina, Kassam, Samji, and others, inviting them for Karim's funeral ceremony. Acting appropriately, the Mukhi delays the funeral for a day more, and begins consulting Karim's friends, community members and family relatives for an amicable solution, which anyway seems far from the possibility. When he calls Yasmin for the second time, asking about her children's opinion, she informs him that they wish to meet him once and discuss over their father's last desire. Considering it to be an appropriate chance for him to take a firm decision and complete the funeral without anymore delay, the Mukhi leaves for Glencedar Park, North Toronto the very next morning to meet Bharwani's children. At the death of Bharwani's death, Emil is a university student, Zuleikha has just passed her high school, and Iqbal is a nine year old lad. Having decided to introduce the discussion in a gradual manner, Shamshu begins initially to talk about their father's good deeds, waiting to see if the issue is raised by youngsters themselves. With Zuleikha's decisive nod, Emil, the eldest of the three, begins by putting his views on his father's last wish. Taking control over the debate on her own, Zuleikha firmly resists that that her father should be cremated according to his last desire. Trying to play his honest role as a Mukhi, Shamshu reminds them that cremation is not permitted in their tradition, and that it might even be forbidden on theological grounds. He further continues, telling them that there is a wider community to be consulted, and that even a large section of the family members are to be taken into confidence before coming to any final decision. Unlike her elder brother and mother, who often think twice before responding to Mukhi's advice, Zuleikha puts her opinion forcefully, reminding Shamshu, "But he was our father, we have the right to decide." Assured by his sister's boldness, Emil adds, "what can the community do?" (Vassanji 2006 101), to which Shamshu replies that they might deny the last rites to the body.

Incredulous, Zuleikha questions further, "Does that matter? It wouldn't have mattered to daddy. He would have refused them anyway, if he could" (Vassanji 2006 101). Without complicating the matter further, Mukhi with all his rationale, gives his nod to the family to proceed further in a manner they decide, and leaves for his home. As a goodwill gesture for allowing them to exercise their freewill about the disposal of their daddy's dead body, Emil calls the Mukhi's home and thanks him for the amicable solution. Zuleikha too calls Shamshu, confessing, "Thank you Mukhisaheb. I know my father was right to depend on you. You know what? Some of my uncles have found about this and try to stop us. But we are ready. The law is on our side, isn't it?" (Vassanji 2006 104).

Zuleikha, the daddy's favourite daughter, standing always at his defence even at times of risk, succeeds at last in fulfilling her father's last desire. A recognisable difference between Zuleikha, a girl born to third world diasporic parents in the first world and her Mother Yasmin, who is born and brought up in the third world culture and traditions, is worth considering. Unlike Yasmin, who always depends on the Mukhi at times of crisis, although she too wishes to fulfil her husband's last desire, Zuleikha is depicted to be possessing different personality traits. She takes a firm stand to get her decisions implemented at any cost.

Arranged sequentially prior to 'Last Rites', The story 'Her Two Husbands' takes a brief look at Yasmin's renewed life after Karim Bharwani's death. It may not be an over-emphasis to suggest that Vassanji's attempt of splitting Yasmin's life sketch into two different stories and arranging those events in a chronologically reverse sequence seems to be a deliberate one.

Although not in a direct way, the author seems to be trying to bring out the sensible differences between the Indian and Pakistani Islamic communities living on the same subcontinent. However, the author's focus is in no way directly related to the cultural practices back home. Rather, it is directed at their diasporic life.

While Yasmin and Karim in the story represent East African Indian Community, Aseema and Abid belong to Pakistan. Being a close colleague of Yasmin for long, Aseema acts as a trustworthy friend during the time of crisis. Although born

in a conservative family, Aseema is always an exception in her thoughts and actions. Educated under American teachers at an exclusive private school in Pakistan, she is fond of recalling her school days, which she always discusses. Yasmin, on the other hand, is neither conservative nor extremely modern. After Karim Bharwani's death depicted in the Story 'Last Rites,' she remains alone, and learns to live a widowed life. One day, Aseema invites her for a mushaira[20] at her brother Abid's house. When Yasmin shows reluctance to accept her invitation, Aseema persists, suggesting, "Step out of your weeds, sweetheart, come and meet the world; you do have a life to lead, you know" (Vassanji 2006 75). Followed by Aseema's persistent suggestion is a phone call from Abid, Aseema's brother. He convincingly explains that the invited celebrity is a famous Urudu poet Gharib Ferangi, and adds that Urudu poetry is their culture and Ferangi is the most important Pakistani Urdu poet.

Each moment of Yasmin's life seems to be challenged by her sub-conscious interaction with Karim, who was recognized as a powerful communist and an intellectual during his lifetime. She finds each of her actions being invisibly challenged by him even after his death. When Abid pronounces that Urdu is important for them, Karim's voice spontaneously echoes from behind, "important according to whom?" (Vassanji 2006 77). Whenever she is found deviating from the path she followed along with him previously, Karim begins haunting her with his sceptical questions.

Although Yasmin initially feels that Abid's family is completely alien to her and that she won't be able to fit into that conservative society, she soon realizes that her judgement is superfluous. She happens to be touched by their love and concern for each other, which she comes to know after once attending mushaira at their house. Despite her close friend's absence, Aseema is well received and respected in her family for the first time. She enjoys Ferangi's musical concert, especially the Indian connections he makes in his musical compositions. That is a beginning for her to rebel against Karim's haunting sub-conscious voice. She justifies herself and replies to absent Karim in heart that she is quite correct in attending the musical concert and meeting Aseema's caring family. Accompanying Abid for a western classical concert thereafter, and her willingness to marry him eventually, everything goes against late Karim's wishes.

Yasmin marries Abid two years after Karim's death. Abid already had a daughter from his first wife by the time he gets married with Yasmin. Recalling her father Abid's devotion for all those years after her mother's death, Rabbia once pours herself out before Yasmin, complementing her acceptance to marry her father:

> Amma, you are an angel, you've come like a farishta in to my father's life. He gave up so many years of life out of respect for my mother, worrying about me. But you know what, the weight was worth it. I've never known him happier. Never. If you get my meaning (Vassanji 2006 83).

With Rabbia too becoming closer to her heart, Yasmin assimilates herself with Abid's family, even agrees to visit his hometown in Pakistan. As a part of her visit to Lahore, Yasmin is taken to their family spiritual adviser, Sheikh Murad Ali, who instantaneously begins discussing about western materialism and world politics with the visiting men. As it always happens before him, no woman raises her voice during their men's conversation. However, they continue to whisper among themselves. For Yasmin, however, Sheikh's ideas appear too rigid and narrow. Unable to control her emotions, she speaks out, "But women are not men's property, and they are not half the worth of men" (Vassanji 2006 85).

Throughout the story 'Her Two Husbands', Yasmin's life reflects a dual self. She often tries to justify each of her actions in the light of her late husband's controversial arguments. It takes a long time for her to come out of this state of thinking and takes her own decisions. She comes to face altogether a different reality after her marriage with Abid. This time her dual self staggers between religious conservatism and material modernity. In fact, she is a fan of neither of the both. Her life appears to be suggesting duality and fragmented nature as is a common feature of diasporic women.

Sheikh and Karim are two key figures depicting an ideological imposition occurring both in the first and the third worlds. While Sheikh in Lahore represents the institutionalization of religion and its imposition upon individuals in the third world and their diasporic communities anywhere on the globe, Karim represents the propagation of an ideological faith in the material world. These two mutually

opposing dimensions and their impact on Yasmin's life suggest that the third world diasporic women have to undergo a severe stress of dual self. Although Yasmin is able to successfully relieve herself from Karim's subconscious, the same seems impossible for her in the case of Sheikh in Lahore. For his calm, polite, unharmful and loving nature, Abid has a strong belief that Sheikh is the divine mediator between the man and God.

Shortly after Yasmin's argument with Sheikh, the religious head, who is widely respected by the Pakistani diaspora community all over the world, sends an edict prescribing that all women should cover their heads with black or white chadors, which should preferably be up to shoulder length. Justifying his move, Sheikh informs his diasporic followers that his decision became imperative because of declining moral order in the world and its adverse impact on the religion. On hearing about this edict, Yasmin suspects that it might be an authoritative reaction of a religious head in response to her outburst before him just a few days before in Pakistan. Astonished by the happening, she questions Abid, "What? Are you sure... every woman? Even in Canada and US? Think of public relations. He won't relent? What's come over him..." (Vassanji 2006 87). She initially refuses to wear the chador, protesting that she is not ready to go out with that tent. Trying to convince her, Abid insists that it is not a tent, and that it is supposed to cover only over the shoulders. The edict spreads around all members of Pakistani diasporic community within a short time, and the very next evening it is a focus of a talk in a potluck dinner party attended by ten couples organised exclusively to discuss the Sheikh's edict. All of them try to put forward their own interpretations with differing perspectives. For instance, they acceptably come to a conclusion that since black meant dark, there was no harm in wearing blue, and since the Sheikh hadn't mentioned anything about the material of the cloth and its design, it was acceptable for one to wear even the embroidered one, and so on. Their differing, unsettled views give a relief to Yasmin.

As has already been mentioned previously, therefore, Vassanji portrays the double consciousness in the whole depiction of 'Her Two Husbands', providing Yasmin's life as an illustration. The double consciousness pointed out particularly in this story is in terms of culture and tradition in third world diasporic women's lives. Both the Stories 'Last Rites' and 'Her Two Husbands', at some point of their

depiction, appear to be challenging the very notion of tradition. Of course, Vasanji carries forward his critical ideas on tradition and religion even into other stories of the present collection as well.

In the story 'The Trouble With Tea', Vassanji provides a rational view of both religion and tradition using "a cup of morning tea," a common phenomenon in one's routine life. It is in this particular story that Vassanji takes a close look at the concept of "faith" in God Emphasizing that it is not only religion and culture that travel along with a person to diasporia, but also his/her own tradition. These factors, in effect, reinforce themselves on individuals of diasporic communities in their new destinations.

Interestingly in this story, Vassanji depicts human mind's inability to fully devote itself to prayer and meditation. The protagonist of 'The Trouble with The Tea' is depicted to have been often diverted to worldly affairs and his own problems, spending away his precious hour of meditation on unintended purposes.

'The Trouble with Tea' revolves around a regular devotee to early morning prayer at four o' clock in the morning. As part of an established tradition, a sweet creamy tea, with its common flavour, is served every morning at the Mosque. In the narrator's perception, it is the taste of the tea, rather than their devotion and faith, which drives everyone to the morning mosque. The tradition of having a cup of morning tea is present everywhere – in Toronto, Dar es Salaam, Vancouver and in Dundas Street. What is puzzling is the sameness of taste of tea served each morning at all places. provided only at the morning session of mosque, it is called "the tea of the morning session" (Vassanji 2006 160).

Once in the Dundas Street Mosque, a doctor is appointed to preside over the early morning prayers. Having decided purely upon his medical prescription that tea is injurious to health, the doctor begins serving a glass of cool water in place of the morning tea. Not long after his new rule is put in place, he finds himself alone in the mosque, a tragedy that the suspension of morning tea has created. Realizing the adverse social implications of his medical prescription, he brings back tea into the

morning session, which in effect, ensures the normal strength of devotees at the Mosque.

In order to justify their absence at the morning prayer during the days of cool water provision, people come up with different explainations, narrating multiple events which they describe to have obstructed them on their way to the Mosque. A ghost coming in the form of a cop, and a famous preacher volunteering in driving away the policeman ghost, subsequently after which nothing appearing for three days, but his car being stopped and the Missionary giving a folded card, presumably his license, to the cop on the fourth day, accepting which the cop disappearing forever, are some of the events narrated to have occurred to prevent devotees from attending their morning Mosque. Together with such thread of events told to have occurred, Vassanji employs a multiplicity of narrations in 'The Trouble with Tea.' What is interesting in peoples' narration of the above events is their belief in ghosts, which is quite contrary to their faith in God. However, there are some in the Mosque, who stood opposing these ghost stories. Much more important than their belief or disbelief in the existence of ghosts is the continued prevalence of such homeland narratives among the third world diasporic communities in the first world.

Another important central focus Vassanji tries to highlight in the story is peoples' preference for tea over their morning spiritual activity. Many devotees seem to be coming regularly to the morning mosque largely, if not solely, because of the strong, creamy tea that gives them a special taste. Most of their minds get diverted to worldly affairs. Others sleep, snoring and wake up exactly at tea time, pretending as if they were following the prayers carefully, and only a few may be devoted to their morning service. Frequently reported events such as: a man in a deep sleep falling on a woman nearby him unconsciously and getting his dividence paid in return by the female victim, "Don't you have any shame?" (Vassanji 2006 161), another man being found himself in a deep sleep in between the tittering women, And finally, the unnamed protagonist in the story, who attends the morning mosque regularly, but is never able to control his sleep, and therefore, has never been able to meditate with full concentration, are some of the clear depictions which indicate half-hearted religious sentiments of the third world diasporic population. Shown in the story is also a fact that devotees are well aware of a constant battle continuing within their conscience.

An ongoing rivalry in the mind of the protagonist himself is the best illustration for such a depiction presented in the story. Each time he comes to meditate in the morning, thoughts about his children, the debts, family and friends keep flashing in his mind, forcing him finally to think about thinking itself.

One day after being revealed by an angel in his dream that his name figures neither in the list of those who loved god the most nor in the category of those whom god remembered the most, he refers back to an allegory told in his childhood about the king Raja Manshudh and his devotion to his spiritual Lord:

> One day, in Gujarat in Ancient India, a message came to a king called Raja Manshudh, commanding him to bring his presence before his spiritual lord. He was to take his queen with him, but not their infant son. So early at dawn the next day the King and Queen set off on a journey to see their Lord. Their way took them upon long trails through forests and woods, the king leading and his wife following faithfully behind, tired and pining for her absent baby. Emerging into a clearing once, the couple came upon a female deer under a small tree, suckling her little one. The sad queen, her breasts gorged with her own milk, collapsed at this reminder of her child and died on the spot. Undeterred, the stalwart king picked up on his wife on his shoulder and continued on his voyage till the end, where he presented himself and his dead queen before the master. The Lord was pleased and rewarded Raja Manshudh. The queen came alive and the child was brought back into her arms (Vassanji 2006 163-164).

The way in which the protagonist of 'The Trouble with Tea' understands and applies to his present condition the allegory briefly mentioned above, which he had heard during his childhood, needs a critical examination. Unwilling to admit his inability to maintain a balance between worldly matters and divine principles, which entail constant devotion without any deviation, The Protagonist approaches his failure in a dimension suited to blame his family and the world for his deviant behaviour. Analyzing the allegory, he recalls the explanation he had heard as a child. "The king was our soul, and the journey was the meditation hour, in which the soul set off to be

united with the universal soul; The Queen was the fickle, desiring part of mind, what we call the heart, and the child was all that was dear to the heart. Beat, kill the wavering mind and reach the Goal, The Truth" (Vassanji 2006 164). What seems more painful in the allegory for any genuine reader is the depiction of apprehensive attitude towards female Gender. An oath-abiding wife, who follows faithfully behind her husband and dies at the reminder of her absent baby, the one who is supposed to be recognized for her bravery and sensitive honesty, is eventually sketched as "The Fickle, a desiring part of mind," which needs to be beaten and killed in order to reach "the goal, the truth." It is unfortunate to see the allegories such these too travelling along with diasporic communities and influencing their day-to-day decisions. Vassanji's aptitude in picking up an ancient Indian allegory and placing it in a right context shows his brilliant literary experimentation. However, it would have been much more revealing, had he extended the story a little further and made the protagonist realise that it is not "Fickle" what causes a failure, rather one's own inability to stand up to the temptation.

The story 'The Sky To Stop Us' has the brief depiction of a money-mined individual who earns a lot, but finds nothing to own for himself in life. Nazir, the protagonist of the story, is a hardworking son of a Grocer in Toronto. First as a bank clerk and then as a successful businessman, Nazir is found involved always in the accumulation of wealth, which he considers is the prime aim of life. By the time he comes to a realization that life is a gift to be cherished to its fullest length, a major part of which he had already lost, things have begun slipping out of his hands. On a tiresome evening when he is back home as usual, there is a note waiting for him on the table with the news he mightn't have expected. Written by his wife, Alma, the note reads: "I've gone away for a while with Z, will call you later" (Vassanji 2006 42). His efforts to inquire of her with his son Shaf prove him to be a failed family head. Despite his wife, two children and a father at home, always waiting to have the benefit of spending at least few minutes with them in a day, he hardly pays heed to their desires. Alma's aspiration to go out with him along with the kids for an amusement never gets fulfilled in her lifetime with him. His only struggle is to earn a house of a million dollars worth, a separate sports car for his wife, to admit the children in a good school and to provide them with all the luxuries they expect. But when his wife and children leave him alone, trying to reach the world which they wish

to live in, he is forced to learn that the money he earned all these days cannot bring him out of his loneliness. His investment proves him wrong, something he never even imagined in his life.

Alma's portrayal in the story is particularly important, reflecting the first world reality. She always aspires to claim equal rights at home, which she successfully did one day, although in a rebellious manner. Before she finds her way out of the home, Nazir treats her as a thing of beauty,[21] not allowing her even to work outside. Probably, it might be his extreme thinking amidst a free society that forces Almas to break the stereotypes and searche for her individual freedom. Like other rebellious women such as Shirin in the story 'When She Was Queen', Anaar Dhalla in the story 'The Girl On The Bicycle' and Zuleikha in the story 'Last Rites', Alma's depiction too represents an individual's aspiration for freedom irrespective of the gender.

As has been emphasized throughout the present chapter, the third world diasporic parents are always eager to get their sons married with virgins from their own homelands. Reasons behind such a desire of these parents are multifold. Extension of their kinship, preservation of their culture – their language, literature and lifestyle – and most importantly, getting a woman always ready to follow her husband's commands, etc, act as the decisive factors in the selection of a third world woman as a prospective bride. 'The Expected One' depicts two such events.

In the Story 'The Expected One', Nagji and Ali Jadavji, both born to Indian parents in East Africa, visit India in search of prospective brides for themselves. Entering the same village one after the other, both of them are well received by their Indian ancestors in Gujarat. Although second to Nagji in visiting India, Ali Jadavji gets what he has come exactly for and leaves for Canada with his seventeen-year-old wife.

Jadavji's unnamed wife, a helpless daughter given away by her poverty-crushed parents under compelling conditions, separates herself from him at the age of thirty and learns to live on her own. Taking it as a responsibility, she sponsors a migrant's visa for her parents to come to Canada to live with her. Although the

reasons for her divorce from Jadavji just thirteen years after their marriage have not been mentioned in the story, the subordination she might have undergone as a second wife to him could be a prime cause for her revolutionary decision. What is much more revealing in the story is her transformation once after reaching the first world. She reaches a stage, where she could think of her parent's welfare and begin acting accordingly, an act she was unable even to think of during her days back at homeland. This analysis, however, does not support any fancy idea that there is a miraculous air in the first world that can transform every woman as a self-sufficient individual. What seems apparent in most of the stories portrayed in the short story collection under discussion is that the third world women are able to prove themselves successful once they can come out of the unruly cultural practices imposed upon them both here at home and abroad. Interestingly, the first world offers them such a possibility to successfully demonstrate their resistance against these unruly impositions. Those who are able to make proper use of these social conditions available to them in the first world are successful enough to lead a life they desire for. This is one of the central themes clearly visible in Vasanji's present short story collection.

Finally, the story 'Is It Still October' too has the depiction of a third world diasporic woman, who leaves her husband two decades after their relationship, but this time, for a different reason unacceptable in any culture. Having travelled with her husband from Pakistan into the new lands, she becomes a mother of four children, the last one being sexually deformitive. It is this last deformed male child, who becomes a cause for her depression and separation from the family. Although she is well-informed about the deformity of her child to be born, she is reluctant to go for an abortion when presented with that choice. But finally, she elopes with Pious Ayub within a few months after the child's birth, making the baby's deformity reason for her act of cowardice.

By depicting a lonely father narrating his mistakable past to his deformed child on that Halloween[22] night, Vassanji seems to have altogether a different rationale in presenting 'Is Still October' in *Elvis, Raja.* The protagonist in the story is depicted to have migrated from Pakistan to Canada for his science education. In spite of his skills and research qualities, however, he remains as a mere technician just because of his Professor Jim Burton's racial reluctance to award him the Ph.D.

degree, that would have made him a renowned scientist. Therefore, in most probabilities, Vassanji chose to highlight the racial exploitation that an Asian immigrant has to undergo in the first world professions through this Story. Being a specialist in nitrosamine, Jim Burton exploits protagonist's scientific expertise and publishes papers in his own name.

Disconcerted eventually in life, the protagonist decides to take revenge by mixing poison in the sweets and candies on the Halloween day. However, convinced with his own ideology that "*Evil does not have to be punished; and mercy noticed*" (Vassanji 2006 119), he never implements his decision. The protagonist's last conviction, emphasized in italics, might also reflect the author's belief that evil is prone to be punished by God and his almighty power. Unlike other stories in the collection, in which major characters are identified with their names, 'Is It Still October' is presented with unnamed characters, including the protagonist of the story.

Unlike *Uhuru Street*, set in Dar es Salaam, the stories in *Elvis, Raja* have multifarious setting of different localities, spreading around – Asia, Africa and the Northern American Continent. The narrator, in most of these stories, goes back to his/her homeland realities, emphasizing the time-Space dimension of a particular event highlighted in the story. As in Vassanji's other writings, each story in *Elvis, Raja* is woven with its own distinct features.

The story 'The Expected One' is the only story set in a remote village in Gujarat, India. It carries an excellent depiction of superstitious beliefs and practices found in the Indian subcontinent. Vassanji gives an account of a foreigner's image of a prosperous village in India, which eventually gets changed when faced directly with poverty stricken village communities in the country. While passing through dusty, Indian villages, dried fields waiting for rain, a mob acting as if digging a big river just to get the proposed daily wage of the government scheme, and bewildering thoughts of the people, Nagji realizes that a rosy picture he has created in his mind about Indian Village is quite contrary to the real situation he is now encountering face to face.

'Dear Khatija' is different from other stories in the collection in so far its narration is concerned. Firstly, it is the only story depicted by a female narrator; and secondly, it is also the only story, which is epigraphically arranged in the whole collection. While The stories 'When She Was Queen', 'Is It Still October' and 'Farida' have been depicted with first person narration, other stories 'The Sky To Stop Us', 'The Expected One', 'Elvis, Raja', 'The Trouble With Tea' and 'She with Bill and George' are told in third person narration.

Each story in the collection begins with its focal point indicated in the title. The Story 'When She was Queen', beginning with "My father lost my mother one evening in a final round of gambling at the poker table" (Vassanji 2006 1), 'The Sky To Stop Us', beginning with "His wife had left him" (Vassanji 2006 42), 'Her Two Husbands', opening with "How ironic for him, she thought that it began with the phone call, the unravelling of his presence in her life" (Vassanji 2006 74), 'The Trouble With Tea', starting with "Having removed his shoes in the shoes-and-coat corner at the far end long shadow corridor, he retraced his steps partway and came to the brightly lit anteroom, which he entered proceeding straight for the tea" (Vassanji 2006 159), are some of the stories, which are begun with their thematic introduction.

Given the multifarious account of the third world diasporic women's lives depicted in *Elvis, Raja*, the exploration of gender in the collection remains far more challenging than one might expect. What has been tried out throughout the present chapter is to understand the implicit formation of gender predicament, taking into account an explicit memory of "Thinking back Home", which appears more significant for third world diasporic women than their male counterparts. An attempt has been made to examine such a gender based cultural preference particularly among the Asian diasporic women in the first world, a debatable literary focus in *Elvis, Raja*. The next chapter will try to draw a comparison between day-to-day cultural practices of the Asian diasporic women living in the first world as depicted in the present collection and those in *Uhuru Street* discussed in the previous chapter.

END NOTES

[1] 'Arun Prabha Mukherjee, an Indo-Canadian': Arun Prabha Mukherjee was born in Lahore in 1946, the then undivided India and brought up in Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh. Since she was born in the undivided India and brought up in proper independent India, later migrated to Canada in the year 1971, she is considered as an Indo-Canadian.

[2] 'North American continent': This includes both the United States and Canada. According to the map and geographical location, it includes Mexico too. However, in this context, it means only Canada.

[3] 'Indian African Canadian': <<http://www.wikipedia.org/search>> accessed on 20 Dec 207.

[4] 'Farida': This name figures in both the stories i.e, 'She With Bill And George' and ''Farida'. She is the major character in both the stories. There is no evidence that both the characters of the same name are one and the same person. Therefore, one has both the characters as two different women and has presumed that there is no continuity between in these stories and they are two different stories.

[5] 'third world diasporic women/South Asian women': The term third world diasporic women in general includes women from all the third world nations like Africa, Carribbean countries and Fiji. But in this context it refers to those South Asian women who migrated from South Asia to East Africa and to Canada.

[6] Vassanji, M.G. *When She Was Queen.* Toronto: Double De Canada, 2005.

[7] Vassanji, M.G. *Elvis, Raja.* New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 2006.

[8]Black Panther Party originally called as Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was an African-American organization to promote civil rights and self defense. It was active in the United States from the mid 1960s and into the 1970s. It was founded in Oakland, California by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966.

[9] "Planchette": It is a yellow heart-shaped piece of plastic on three stubby legs with a circular viewing window in the centre. It is a small triangular board supported by two casters and a vertical pencil that when lightly touched by the finger tips is said to spell out the subconscious or supernatural messages.

[10] "Raja": It means King in most of the Indian languages like Hindi, Marati, Telugu, Kannad and other languages of Aryan and Sanskrit origin. Rusty comes from Bombay, Marati and Hindi speaking area.

[11] This Sanskrit Term refers to the obligation of a woman to become a mother.

[12] "Schopenhauer": An Arthur, (1788-1860), a German philosopher who believed that the will is the fundamental reality to which all knowledge and reason are subject, that following its dictates leads to illusion and suffering and that the goal of the good life is its extinction.

[13] "Solomon": King of Israel in tenth century B.C. who is known for his wisdom and architectural beauty. A temple in Jerusalem is constructed during period.

[14] "Beethoven": Ludvig van (1770-1827) is the well-known German composer. He began to loose his hearing in the year 1801 and was deaf by 1819. His music which formed a transition from classical to romantic composition includes, 9 Symphonies, 5 Piano Concertos, a Violin concerto, 32 Piano Sonatas, several other Sonatas, 2 Masses and an Opera.

[15] "Äshik": It means lover in some of the Indian languages like Hindi, Sanskrit and so on.

[16] The term "Pyari" means a female lover in Hindi.

[17] 'Dupatta': it is a long piece of cloth worn by women on top of the churidhar .

[18] "Pandavas": the five brothers who are known as Pancha pandavas in Mahabharat. The reference is because they gambled away their wife Panchali in the game of dice. John chacha suggests Rashid that he could do better than that.

[19] "Chhanta": It is the religious ceremony at which the person is granted forgiveness by his mukhi on behalf of the world and the Almighty.

[20] "Mushaira": It is a private Urudu poetry recitation.

[21] "a woman is a thing of beauty": regional literatures in India like Tamil, telugu and so on woman is treated as a thing of beauty and as a child who has to be taken care of. Such expressions leave a room for most of the traditional societies to treat women as passive and child-like.

[22] "Halloween": October 31st is celebrated by children going door to door wearing costumes and begging treats and playing pranks in the United States, Canada and British isles is called as Halloween.

Chapter V

Diasporic Feminism in M. G. Vassanji's Short Story Collections: A Retrospective Conclusion

Diasporic Feminism in M. G. Vassanji's Short Story Collections: A Retrospective

Conclusion

As indicated at the outset, this study has been an exploration of implicit gender formation in the lives of the south Asian diasporic women, based on M.G. Vassanji's two short story Collections – *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja*. Therefore, The analysis presented in the preceding chapters has been an attempt to analyze the third world diasporic life with its cultural repercussions on women, who migrated either to a different location within the third world or to the first world. As the analysis clearly suggests, the diasporic life is not the same everywhere for everyone. There are socio-cultural-economic and political differences in terms of space and location of diasporic life. While these larger differentials have always been the areas of attraction for researchers, what seems to have been neglected most is the day-to-day operation of diasporic practices and its impact on these issues of larger concern. One of the routine practices of diasporic life, which directly relates to the operation of culture in Diaspora, is the gender-based imposition of homeland customs and traditions. The present study has been undertaken to find out as to what exactly such a gender-based cultural inequality means to the lives of diasporic women in general and to the third world diasporic women in particular.

Although looking into a less researched area might seem quite exciting in the beginning, it is a difficult task to arrive at a conclusion and present its findings. This is what is also true of the present study as well. There have been two obvious difficulties faced in the course of carrying out the study in its present shape. First, bringing out gendered narration from Vassanji's short story collections was a quite an ingenious effort, not because his narration of events is far difficult to be understood, but because of the possibility for multiple interpretation of his texts, which he always presents with a rich content to explain diverse contexts. Second, it appeared during the course of undertaking the case study of Vassanji's two short story collections that one has to be extra cautious in interpreting women characters depicted by a male narrator. Again, it is not because Vassanji might have a sort of bias in his depiction of women characters, but

because the purpose of introducing a particular woman character under a particular context would sometimes rise above the interpretation this study has chosen to investigate. Probably because of these two precise reasons, the researcher of the study has an impression that there is much more to be investigated about the gender in Vassanji's two short story collections than it could have been explored in the present study due to the time and space constraints under which it has been carried out.

In the analysis of Vassanji's two short story collections, the present study has drawn substantial impetus from Chandra Talpade Mohanty's view that the third world feminism should run along with the Western Feminist discourses to address the ghettoization and marginalization of third world women.[1] While rendering justification for the title of her book *Feminism Without Borders*, she writes,

> Feminism Without borders is not the same as borderless Feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border that the lines between and through nations, races, sexualities, religions and disabilities are real and—that a Feminism Without Borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division (Mohanty 2).

Her views, when applied to the present study, give an impression that diasporic feminism is constituted to address the struggles, fault lines, conflicts, fears, differences and containment of third world diasporic women. The third world diasporic women considered in the present study can be classified into two main categories: those who migrated from Asia (particularly Indians) to East Africa, who were later known as Asian Africans and those Asian Africans who migrated from East Africa to Canada and other parts of the first world. In the fourth chapter in particular, this category also included those women, who migrated from Asia to Canada and parts of the first world. Although migration became an inevitable activity after 1960s for many such Asian-Africans also for other third world population due to their political and economic conditions at their

homelands, gender disparity among these diasporic communities remained as one of their socio-cultural practices brought from back home. Vassanji's short story collections reveal that this inescapable cultural practice has been dictating even the pattern of third world migration even till date, often imposing unnecessary restraints upon women migration while their male counterparts are free to move to anywhere having no such cultural accountability. Under these socio-cultural dictums, the most acceptable standard for the third world women to migrate is only in the form of appendages to their husbands. Therefore, it would not be an over emphasis to state that the third world migration is often patterned on the basis of gender and homeland cultures. In fact, it is such a discriminatory pattern of migration which gave rise to diasporic feminism in the recent past. But how far would the new discourse of diasporic feminism be successful in finding a comprehensive solution for the problems faced by the third world diasporic women is altogether a complex question that goes beyond the purview of the present study. However, diasporic feminism is potent enough to enable the third world diasporic women to fight for their own cause and successfully mediate between two cultures – the one which travels along with them from their homelands and the other which directly faces them from the very first moment they enter into the diasporia.

The first chapter of this dissertation being an introductory one, the conclusive findings that can be drawn from the second chapter are more theoretical in nature. Two significant inferences can be drawn from these findings. First, diasporic feminism is a theoretical response to oppressive, gender-based socio-cultural practices directed towards the third world diasporic women. Unlike many other major theoretical formulations, which are generally structured to directly oppose and eliminate the problem-creating agencies, diasporic feminism is, instead, intended to empower today's victims so as to make them stand prepared to face the impending hurdles in their progress. Second, there is an increasing realization that the operation of gender in diaspora is often dictated by the cultures and traditions designed back at home. One's own choice of either adhering to or rejection of these designed patterns is decided based on his/her gender. The diasporic feminist theory understands that there is a need for the amalgamation of dominant

theories of Culture, Diaspora and Gender in order to provide a comprehensive solution for the complex reality of gender imbalance in diasporic life.

In order to provide a practical approach to the theoretical findings of the second chapter, the third and the fourth chapters of the dissertation have carried out a case study of women characters in Vassanji's two short story collections – *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja* respectively. The analysis of these two short story collections proved more fruitful as both of them have been set in two different locations, the first in Uhuru Street and the Second largely in Toronto, representing the third and the first world cultures respectively. The depiction of women characters in both the collections has striking similarities and dissimilarities. While the portrayal of gender, race, religion, class and unhomeliness often experienced by diasporic communities remains largely similar in both the collections, the choice of location, space frame, thematical changes and introduction of distinct characters are the obvious dissimilarities found between the both.

The style and story narration, socio-political and economic ambiance, in which Vassanji sets his stories seem to have a wider implication in the way they can be understood and interpreted. The women residing at Uhuru Street in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania have been depicted as poor but courageous and hard working. They work hard to support their families and themselves. Depicting the events close to reality, *Uhuru Street* portrays the occupational differences between men and women. While women are involved mostly in such menial jobs as selling samosas, book-keeping in the mosque library, knitting and stitching clothes, managing a tiny grocery shop etc, men are often treated capable enough to take up such occupations as Running risky businesses, teaching, preaching, and anything that seemed more prestigious and money-making. Above all, the stories in this collection reflect the struggles of the third world diasporic women for survival, of which women in Uhuru Street are the best examples in East Africa. Although women in Uhuru Street live independent lives on their own either as widows or being unmarried individuals, they are more often than not prepared to come out of their cultural impositions, a belief that male is the bread winner of a family, and that protection can be assured only by their sons. Their self-beliefs however, reveal that

although they are courageous enough to fight for their survival and efficient enough to manage their families, they do not seem to have confidence in themselves that they would be able to fight against the social and sexual harassments.

Elvis, Raja is set in a new location from that of *Uhuru Street*. The stories in the collection have been sparsely spread around Tanzania, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Canada and United states. Unlike in the *Uhuru Street*, only few women are depicted to have been working to earning their livelihoods in *Elvis, Raja*. Women in this collection are quite radical and rational both in their thoughts and actions. Given their socio-economic conditions, women characters in Elvis, Raja are not required to go for laborious tasks to earn their daily bread as they are not as poor as their counterparts illustrated in *Uhuru Street*. They do not hesitate to resist the social oppressions, chauvinistic values and irrational traditions. However, they are not in anyway different from those in *Uhuru Street* in accepting male as the head of family and religion. *Elvis, Raja* also has an elaborate, liberal discussion on homosexuality, a complex living reality for the third world diasporic women to accept without reservations.

Drawing from the above analysis, one can find a sequence of events and rich content presented in Vassanji's two short story colections – *Uhuru Street* and *Elvis, Raja*. Unlike any other fictional narator, Vassanji appears to have reflected in his short story collections a chronological sequence of feminist movements and their impact on his women characters.

Given the limitations of the present study both in its content and scope because of time constraints, it has been successful only in identifying the effective operation of Class, Race, Culture and Gender in diasporic lives of the third world. The focus in the study has been narrowed down specifically to gender and culture found in Vassanji's two short story collections. Given the complex questions involved in the debate over the operation of culture and gender in the third world diasporic life, what has been attempted in the present study is only a beginning, in line with which there is a wider scope for further research. Vassanji's other writings, equally rich in content, can serve as the best

literary platform to carry out such an intended task on a much larger scale. An interrogation of Vassanji's presentation of women characters from the standpoint of language-based identity politics, the textual analysis of women characters: Ji bai, Kulsum, Amina, Zehra, Mariamu, Deepa, Madhu and Marge Tomson in his novels – *The Gunny Sack, No New Land, The Book Of Secrets, The In-Between World Of Vikram Lall and The Assassin's Song* – can be part of such a future research. Such an impending research can be a great contribution to the postcolonial gender discourse.

End Note

[1] Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.

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