NIDHI CHANANI'S *PASHMINA*: A SINGLE MOTHER'S QUEST FOR DIASPORIC RELOCATION

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Abstract

Nidhi Chanani in her debut graphic novel, *Pashmina* synthesizes the diasporic dilemma of dislocation and relocation in a multicultural context through Nimisha's character. As a first-generation immigrant, Nimisha projects the concept of "cultural transplantation" in a diasporic setting. She represents the Indian-American women and brings out their quandaries, joys, and sorrows during their struggle between relocation and acculturation. Seen through the eyes of Priyanka, *Pashmina* charts Nimisha's quest for identity in India and the diaspora. Through the psychological, cultural, and generational conflict of Nimisha and her daughter, Nidhi Chanani presents a mother-daughter duo to us who challenge the traditional concept of diasporic womanhood in various ways. The present paper demarcates the zones of Nidhi Chanani's female diasporic characters' confirmation of the prevalent diasporic theories and their breaking from them. It further proceeds to focus on how the traditional concept of diasporic victimhood and forced exile has given way to emancipation and identity formation. Finally, the article examines how the graphic novel presents America as a total antithesis to India: although geographically alien, the country is perceived by immigrant women as a place in which they can survive with dignity and respect.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Graphic novel; Indian diaspora.

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"The banyan tree has thrust down roots in soil which is stony, sandy and marshy has somehow drawn sustenance from diverse unpromising conditions. Yet the banyan tree itself has changed; its similarity to the original growth is still there, but it has changed in response to its different environment." (Tinker, 1977, 19)

"I got my start by giving myself a start!"
Madam C. J. Walker

Introduction

The famous quote by Madam C. J. Walker, used as epigraph to this work, befits Nimisha in Nidhi Chanani's debut graphic novel, *Pashmina.* As a second-generation immigrant, Nidhi Chanani synthesizes the diasporic dilemma of dislocation and relocation in a multicultural context, and Nimisha, the mother of the protagonist, projects the concept of "cultural transplantation" in a diasporic setting (Jayaram, 2004, 240). She has been portrayed as an Indian-American woman, and Nidhi Chanani brings out her quandaries, joys, and sorrows during her struggle between relocation and acculturation. This paper charts Nimisha's quest for identity in India and in the diaspora, and how Nidhi Chanani effectively bridges the gap between Kolkata and California. It illustrates the ambiguity of Indian culture celebrating shakti worship on the one hand and confining the real shakti on the other. Through the psychological, cultural, and generational conflict between Nimisha and her daughter, Chanani masterfully presents an America that, though geographically alien, appears to its immigrant women folk as a land with better livelihood opportunities—a representation of the America of the 1980s, that stimulates ideas of freedom, dignity, and equality for its citizens irrespective of their class, caste, and gender.

This paper focuses on how Nidhi Chanani deviates from the traditional concept of Indian diasporic writings in three ways: firstly, the generational conflict between the first and the second-generation women of the diaspora portray their dilemmas in just the reverse of the usual order; then, the traditional concept of victimhood and forced exile gives way to emancipation and identity formation; and, finally, the realistic portrayal of India, as well as America, breaks the myth of motherland as a dreamland. The first part of the paper delineates various prevalent theories on the Indian Diaspora. The paper further proceeds to demarcate the zones of how Nidhi Chanani's female diasporic characters confirm the prevalent diasporic theories and how they break from them.

Development of Indian Diasporic Fiction (An Introduction to Diaspora)

Diasporic sensibility is the outcome of a deep yearning and nostalgia for one's motherland, and diasporic literature is the outcome of this sensibility. In the last century or so, this has garnered attention from various disciplines and cross-disciplinary studies. Diaspora, however, is a more specific and inclusive

term as it is concerned with permanent and long-term settlements on an international level. It also includes second and third-generation immigrants (Tigau, Pande, and Yuan, 2017, 183). Commencing with Jewish or Armenian exile, presenting loss, and victimhood, in recent times, diaspora has been marked by vibrant communities who not only have motherland connections but have also been integrated into the host culture (Sen, 2017, 27). While etymologically derived from the Greek *diasperien—dia*: "across"; *–sperien*: "to sow or scatter seeds,"—since the inception of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991, the term has acquired a multidimensional space (Braziel, and Mannur, 2003, 2). Virgil Suarez rightly stated, "We have taken root where exile threw us" (Braziel, and Mannur 2).

Women's Diasporic Writings in India

Although the vast arena of diasporic writing encompasses authors from various niches of the world, in recent years, Indian diasporic writings have gained wide accolades and appreciation as best-sellers in the market. A significant development of Indian diasporic writing is the "resurgence of women's writing" (J. Jain, 1997, 60). Mukesh Ranjan Verma notes that "the most striking feature" of "feminist literature" is that they voice "the sufferings, aspirations, and assertions of women in a traditionally male-dominated world" (Verma, 2002, 5). Women's diasporic writings are different from men's as men migrate in search of better careers, but women mostly travel "as appendages of the men in their lives, as wives, daughters or mothers." (Mishra, 2020, n.p.). Uma Parameswaran sees it through a gender perspective and states that women are naturally gifted to live in two cultures—the mother's and the husband's (*Writers*, 1998, 32). Moreover, critics like Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma suggest a significant difference between the narratives of South-Asian women's diaspora and other women's diasporas (2006, 150). The particular familial structure of South Asia and the restrictions imposed on women lead them to recount different narratives of self-formation. Their journey of assimilation surfaces countless sociocultural issues (Chu, 2000, 4). Although the types and consequences of female migration and assimilation are as diverse as the Indian diaspora itself, they still share space with men as "victims" or "passive agents," especially in the context of the third world (Pande, 2019, v). The diasporic influences on gender relations and gender hierarchies have liberated and coerced women. In some families, it opened up new avenues of self-assertion, and in the other, gender hierarchies were reinforced even more rigorously (Pande v). However, balancing the power subtleties of the traditional homeland and the redemptive opportunities of the host land, they create new identities and move beyond the rigid patriarchal boundaries (Pande v).

Instead of narrating tales of suppression and victimhood, Indian diasporic writings conceptualized globalization's versatility and plurality (Nonini, 2005, 559). Books from multiple genres, ranging from crime novels, sari fiction, and comic strip novels fill the book shops as never before. The fundamental

contrast is ostensible between the sari-clad traditional Indian women of the earlier post-colonial period and the smoking, drinking young women hailing from small townships of modern India. Stories are set around fast-urbanizing small townships, middle-class families, mushrooming technology institutes, and skyscrapers of metros. The curious, adventurous, resilient new middle class is better-traveled and better-read, and with their steady income, they display a better tolerance for experiments of literary genres.

Brief Outline of *Pashmina*

The latest addition to the plethora of Indian diasporic fiction is *Pashmina*, written by cartoonist Nidhi Chanani, the first Indian American graphic novelist. *Pashmina* candidly frames Priyanka Das, also known as Pri Das, an Orange County, California-based comics-obsessed teenager, and her mother Nimisha in comic panels. Priyanka's mother's silence regarding her father's identity and his absence bothers her and further strengthens her desire to find out the truth. One day, when her mother is not at home, Priyanka discovers a beautifully embroidered pashmina shawl kept in one of the suitcases. Gradually she learns about the magical quality of the shawl. Whenever she wraps the shawl around her waist, she finds herself transported to a colorful world that is similar to India. The world otherwise looks black and white to her. These magical interludes only intensify her desire to visit India, find out about her roots, and resolve the mystery behind the magic of pashmina. On her journey to India, she meets Meena Mausi, her mother's sister, and discovers the gruesome death of Rohini Mitra, the weaver of the shawl.

The young protagonist Priyanka epitomizes the doubts, fears, and dilemmas of a teenager oscillating between two paradoxes; America and India. Priyanka Das is a self-doubting comic artist who could never associate with the cool girls of her American high school. They call her "Teacher's pet" and misspell her name as "Priyucka" (Chanani, 2017, 6). Her school experience is "the usual horror show" (Chanani 22). Her journey of self-discovery progresses between the black-and-white and the colorful pages of the novel. The boredom and estrangement of her daily life and queries of an untold past are featured in black and white. She is transported to the colorful world of fantasy as soon as she places the pashmina on her shoulders. The pashmina serves as a gateway to her imaginary India inhabited by a talking elephant, Kanta, a peacock Mayur, and a mysterious shadow. Unlike the students at her school, they welcome her, proclaiming, "We've been waiting for you" (Chanani 42). Gradually, much like the colorful embroidery of the manifolds of the pashmina, the colorful India of her imagination with its beautiful palaces, deserts of Rajasthan, jungles of Northeast, and luscious delicacies, unfolds a "familiar" wonderland to her (Chanani 46).

Nimisha, on the other hand, was born and brought up in India and hails from a middle-class background. Like other female diasporic characters, she is also torn between two homes, the home of dislocation and the home of

relocation. According to Nosalek (2020, 54), the diasporic experience includes various emotional commotions, the adventure of migrating out of the country, the tenacity of maintaining homeland ties, and the desire to extend cordiality and solidarity with the locals. The diasporic home represents multiple, "plurilocal" constructed locations of the home and surpasses the ideas of "fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic exclusivity" (Walters, 2005, v, xvi). Today, Indian diaspora, in its battle between the home of origin and the home of adoption, has emerged with a "multiplicity of histories, variety of culture, tradition, and a deep survival instinct" (Pokhriyal, n.d., n.p). Nidhi Chanani has portrayed Nimisha's character as a combination of the immigrants' quest for liberation against the bondages of conventionalism and the haunting nostalgia for the homeland. She symbolizes the diasporic woman's discontent and strife to assimilate into the new culture, living in a foreign country, and remaining Indian to the core. She displays her cultural traits through cooking, dressing, worshipping, and inculcating Indian values in her daughter, "In India, I would never talk this rude way to my mom" (Chanani 32). She teaches Priyanka, "If you want something with your true heart, she (Goddess) will listen." (Chanani 32) She wears salwar-kurta, speaks Hindi, cooks Indian dishes, and reminisces about the movies of Zeenat Aman, Rekha, and Amitabh Bachchan she used to watch with her sister. (Chanani 51)

The Choice of Graphic Medium over Verbal Medium by the Novelist

Pashmina, as discussed above, is a wonderfully embroidered tale of an Indian immigrant family deliberately presented in the written and visual medium as a graphic medium which "has merits that are different than others … there are access points to comics that traditional prose cannot touch" (Makhijani, 2017, n.p.). Every character, speech bubble, wordless panel, and choice of color serves the story in meaningful ways. Chanani has created an immigrant narrative that is suitably complex, capable of grappling with identity, mythology, and magic right alongside the practical choices girls and women face in cultures in which beautiful settings can conceal their oppression. (Zoboi, 2017, n.p.)

Nidhi Chanani has chosen a teenager as her protagonist and has presented the story through her perspective. More than the verbal medium, the pictorial medium adds credibility and intensity to the scenes witnessed and imagined by the teenager Pri. The teenager's perspective forces the adult reader to question his presuppositions and to see things through Pri's frame of mind.

The author has deftly made the selection of graphic medium as it provides both the reader and Pri with an avenue to escape the daily trials and turbulences of life. She developed it as her hobby to overcome her life's dull and mechanical routine. It is a stress-buster for both the readers and Priyanka. The effects of bullying, her mausa's stoic expression, the stark contrast between the confused teenager of the black and white pages and the happy teenager of the colored pages, the matured and satisfied girl of the final pages, the cacophony of Indian roads, the slums, the similar faces of Shakti or Goddess Durga and Priyanka in page 147; all these have

been very clearly depicted through the graphic medium. In India, the pashmina stops working for Pri, though it still works for Meena mausi, who dreams of her daughter. The colors again appear for Pri near the end of the story, when she unlocks the mystery behind the spooky shadow of Rohini Mitra. When all the knots are resolved in the final pages of the story, we find Shakti in a black-and-white frame, i.e., Shakti no more belongs to an imaginary world but to a part of their daily lives. According to Andrea Lunsford, the art form allows "the images to free up the words to do what words do the best, and vice versa" (quoted by Myers, 2016, n.p.).

Discussion

The Portrayal of India as a Land of Contradictions

The complexity of Indian culture comes from its incredible capacity to incorporate contradictions within its fold. One such contradiction is the discrimination against women in India. Ancient Hindu mythology prescribes worship of Goddesses in the form of Durga, Katli, Saraswati, Kmamakshya, Lakshmi, etc. During the Pre-Vedic ages, women were offered special status in society, and Goddess Durga was considered the "Mother of the universe" (McDaniel, 2004, 90–92; Brown, 1990, 77; Coburn, 2002, 303–309). Durga Puja is celebrated all over India with great fervor and zeal. However, gender discrimination is prevalent in various socio-economic traditions and is apparent in various fields like education, decision-making power, and experiences of domestic violence (Pathak, 2019, 218). Female foeticide and premature death of girls is one such instance of gender inequality in India. The present government's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (Save the daughter, educate the daughter) policy is a step towards eliminating the imbalance.

Gender discrimination is a much-argued trope in Indian literature. Ismat Chughtai, Amrita Pritam, Mahasweta Devi, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and many more have voiced their opinions regarding this dual nature of Indian culture (Purkayastha et al., 2003, 503). In *Pashmina*, Nidhi Chanani has presented Nimisha as a woman who conceives Pri without being married. Although she has neither shame nor guilt, she knows the repercussions a woman faces in India for such an act. As a second-generation diasporic writer, Nidhi Chanani knew India from the first-hand experience of her parents and several visits to her motherland. In her own words:

> My inspiration for *Pashmina* came from a variety of sources: my mom, growing up in the US, my first trip to India, and the choices women make — all of these things are woven into the story. When I was younger my parents would travel to India often. When they returned, their suitcases had a pungent, almost magical smell—from a place that seemed very far away. I was probably 10 years old. Opening their suitcase made me feel close to this other world. In a way, I believe this story has been with me since then. (Quazi, 2018, n.p.)

Her book is an immigrants' chronicle mourning the loss of a relinquished homeland and celebrating the strangeness of a new culture. In order to present a stark contrast between the two cultures, the homeland with its crippling patriarchal traditions, outdated norms, poverty, and stifling cultural regress, and the host land with alienation, dislocation—relocation, assimilation, and liberation—she has painted India and America through the artistic hands of Priyanka Das, her protagonist. To present the male-centric Indian society of the 1980s, the pre-independence era, and the maladies it caused to its womenfolk, Chanani has chosen three compelling women characters, Priyanka's mother Nimisha, her aunt Meena, and Rohini Mitra. Priyanka's transformation journey from a dubious comic artist to a confident writer unfolds India as a land of gender discrimination and female foeticide. However, she has presented a sharp contrast between the patriarchal eccentricities and the perennially looming image of Goddess Durga and suggests the "shakti-puja" tradition in Indian families. When her mother talks of restrictions imposed on Indian women, Pri reminds her of the choice "Shakti" made, "It's like the story you told me about the goddess shakti. … Remember when shakti becomes an ocean? … They say either choose sadness or choose to meditate on the word om. Shakti chooses to meditate. … It's a choice mom." (Chanani 3-4). The life of Meena mausi governed by the daily impositions of her mausa and slum-girls who do not get access to basic requirements like food and education, portray the restrictions and constraints Indian women face in their everyday life.

Nimisha does not want to send Pri to India alone as, "Flying here is okay. India isn't safe." (Chanani 72). She tells Priyanka, "In India, they don't allow girls to drive," and during the medieval period, women "weren't allowed to show their face in public." (Chanani 77). They are not allowed to make decisions on the issues of employment, marriage, education, sex, and social equality. Her aunt addresses her husband as "sahib." His permanent imperious facial expression suggests a society to Pri where women cannot make independent decisions. He dislikes his wife teaching slum-girls. He even denies permission for their visit to Nagpur, the place of Pri's estranged father, "I don't like your teaching in slums and I don't like this Nagpur business." (Chanani 110).

Nimisha and Priyanka as First and Second-Generation Diasporic Characters: Their Confirmation and Deviation

The generational conflict in diasporic families is a much-highlighted theme in the works of female diasporic writers. Authors from Indian diaspora like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Meera Syal, Hari Kunzru, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri have presented the lives and the conflict between first- and second-generation diasporas in their novels (Devi, and Nagalakshmi, 2021, 1909). Whereas the first generation of diaspora exhibits alienation, rootlessness, and a deep sense of loss, the second-generation diaspora easily and willingly adopts the foreign land as their birthplace. "Nostalgia and alienation give place to a sense of connectivity

and affinity with the host land by their parental legacy and ethnic origin" (Kimak, 2015, 235). The first-generation diaspora characters were born in India and spent their childhood there before having relocated to a different country. They carry the baggage of their homeland memories and a constant yearning to return. While holding fast to their inheritance and identity, they constantly attempt to assimilate with the host culture (Patel, 2016, 5). Consequently, they develop a "trishanku" identity, as Uma Parameswaran calls it (*Trishanku*, 1998, 9).

Second-generation diasporic people are born in the country of their parents' relocation, and their values and ideas are shaped by the prevailing mores and conventions of the land of their birth or upbringing. Unlike their parents' feelings of alienation, rootlessness, or nostalgia, they are caught in the tussle to follow their parents or peers. Their relationship with the host country is different from that of first-generation migrants (Patel 5).

Nimisha and Priyanka corroborate with traditional diasporic characters of first and second generation. The traditional portrayal of first- and second-generation diasporic characters presents the first-generation characters as less confident, confused, and alienated, while the second-generation characters are portrayed as minorities who are not completely accepted by the mainstream culture. Since they are not exposed to their original homeland, this "in-betweenness" throws them into a state of confusion (Brocket, 2020, 135). Although Chanani has presented Nimisha as secure and determined, she has portrayed Priyanka as a confused, hesitant, and indecisive teenager. Nimisha may exhibit a nostalgia for her homeland and reminisce about a few things, but she maintains a matter-of-factly stance towards India. Having overcome all the restrictions and traditional bondages, far from holding a romantic outlook, she is strictly realistic in her attitude towards India. On the issue of Priyanka's visit to India, she says, "It's not that easy. I don't want you to go. It's not safe or happy like you imagine it is." (Chanani 82). Pri, on the other hand, passes through a severe identity crisis and is curious to discover her roots. Her romantic association with a pashmina and its multi-colored visions stage India as a dreamland to her. The racial discrimination she faces from fellow students reinforces her fantasy about India. However, her spell breaks as soon as she lands in India, and India comes to her in its usual black-and-white frame.

Although a desire to return to the homeland is a theme very closely related to the diaspora, this desire disrupts assimilation (Clifford, 1994, 305; Raj, 2014, 85; Safran, 1991, 83–4). However, Nimisha never thinks of a return. Her resolution never to return comes from the realistic picture of India Nidhi Chanani presents through the eyes of Priyanka. The noise, traffic, and slums of Kolkata demonstrate the real India to her. She recalls what her mother said, "I know there is beauty there. India is a poor dirty place. It does have beauty. More than here, but all that beauty isn't what it seems" (Chanani 78). She admits it to her mausi, "It's so different. … I chose to visit Jadavpur. It was eye-opening. … My mom told me about poverty… but it's another thing to see it." (Chanani 99, 115, 116)

Moreover, the truth about her birth, the domineering demeanor of Meena mausi's husband, the revelation of the mystery behind the ghastly tale of Rohini Mitra, the weaver of pashmina, disenchant her of her romantic illusion towards India. Gradually she can resolve the knots of her puzzling relationship with her mother. She discovers a self-assertive and firm Nimisha who stakes her identity, safety, and her existence just to save her unborn child. She understands that her mother's resilience to speak the truth about her father comes from the fact that it can poison her innocent heart and cast a permanent shadow on her psyche. Pri's association with Meena mausi also shows how Indian women stand firm in the face of all odds and simultaneously maintain familial ties amicably. The story of Rohini Mitra shows Pri a courageous woman who, despite being poor and uneducated, listens to her heart and protects her dignity. The significance of "shakti" worship finally dawns on her.

Although Nimisha is haunted by homeland memories, and struggles to overcome the trauma of exile, what distinguishes her portrayal from other diasporic female characters is that, instead of opting for the role of a victim of socio-economic exploitation, she opts to collaborate, acquiesce, adapt, and at times disrupt the communication channels in the family to negotiate economic hardships and gender-based oppression. Her character is unique and different from the traditional diasporic female characters as she did not move out as an appendage to her husband or stayed in a protective patriarchal familial set-up, but as an independent individual going through a severe identity crisis and searching for it in an alien land. One of the various qualities that make her a unique and complex character is that the women who migrate for professional opportunities are either highly educated or professionally skilled, but being less educated and at a tender age, she chose to migrate alone. She not only decided to stand up against the accepted social norms but was prepared to face the consequences of her perilous choice. S. Jain suggests that for diasporic women, choices are not enforced. Despite certain restrictions, diasporic women can become either victims and oppressed or more assertive and more empowered (2006, 2312).

The first generation of Indian-Americans, in their attempt to preserve their cultural heritage, enforce traditional values and customs on the second generation (Vincent, and Thanikasalam, 2020, 526). Nimisha, on the contrary, does not impose Indianness on Pri but allows ample space to find answers to her queries. She gives Pri a free hand to take her own decisions. She sometimes suffers but never complains, for Nimisha never speaks of her husband or the reasons for her departure from India, never fills Priyanka's heart with hatred for her father. For Priyanka's endless queries, she has just one answer, "that subject is permanently closed." (Chanani 33)

The Portrayal of Alienation and Rootlessness in First-Generation Diaspora

Similar to homeland memories, the "word Exile evokes multiple meanings, which cover a variety of relationships, mother – country alienation, forced

exile, self-imposed exile, political exile, and so on" (Deshmukh, 2013, 5). The alienation and rootlessness of being exiled rather than operating externally affect the consciousness of the immigrant (Durak, Durak, and Sakiroglu, 2019, 579). During the process of assimilation, the shadows of the past haunt him or her and create hindrances in their cultural transformation (Nosalek 6). Since the complete denial of the past is impossible, the person's psychic self needs reconstruction (Edwards, 2009, 19). This reconstruction is further influenced by their age, education, and professional aptitudes and reinforces that neither the dislocation nor the assimilation is complete (Bleakley, and Chin, 2010, 165).

Although Nimisha imposes a self-exile on herself, through her character, Chanani reveals the pain of exile that immigrants who have nostalgia face in the absence of an amicable solution. She tells Priyanka, "When I came to the US, I thought it would be better. Certain things are good like it's very clean. But not enough respect here" (Chanani 33). The constant battle between the spiritual values of the East and the alluring charm of the West constitutes a sense of estrangement in them. In *Pashmina*, Nimisha evokes the feeling of displacement, dislocation, and alienation that millions of Indian immigrants face while balancing their homeland and host land. Her cravings for Indian foods, maintaining Indian traditions at home, and parallel criticism of Western culture suggest her deep yearning to hold fast to the slipping memories of her past. Nimisha shares an emotional rapport with her the author. In her (Nidhi's) own words, "I was raised Hindu, and I describe myself as a lapsed Hindu. I find that even though I don't practice Hinduism, I have aspects of its spirituality in my life" (Makhijani n.p.). Nidhi Chanani skilfully charts the cross-cultural dilemmas of being in two places simultaneously, one hereditary and forsaken, the other adapted but not wholly assimilated.

The Portrayal of America as a Land of Emancipation

With the surge of Indian women diasporic writers, it is said that women have achieved equality and freedom and have successfully challenged patriarchal norms as the diaspora offers liberatory avenues to its women (Vatsa, 2016, 64). A significant fact is that the new freedom comes to them with certain limitations. As they migrate, they carry a load of their cultural specificities with them (Mukherjee, 2015, n.p.). There are also dowry abuses, forced marriages, and female foeticide abroad, just like in their native country. The financial well-being of working in a high post in multinational companies goes hand in hand with the extremities of their attributed cultural system. Women in the diaspora then voice the two simultaneous issues of subjugation and emancipation (Pande v).

Nidhi Chanani, through the projection of her two diasporic characters, Nimisha and Priyanka, raises the same questions in *Pashmina*: Does emigration positively transform the lives of its women? She states in an interview:

> Although I grew up in your traditional Indian family (mother, father, sibling), we had tons of problems. Those problems, as much as we tried to

hide them from our community, came to define us. My mom eventually left my dad. She was ostracized by the Indian community. I saw what a difficult time my mom had to move within our community without support. In an instance, it's a triumph for women to stand up for themselves, but the community does not support moving past the traditional roles. It adds another challenge. (Makhijani n.p.)

Nimisha also chooses her path and neither regrets her past actions and decisions nor blames others for the consequences. Remorselessly she moves ahead, holding her head high and coming face to face with the trials and turbulences of life. For Nimisha, the choice is America, a "country of immigrants" (Thornton, 2012, n.p.). For the Indian women who refuse to adhere to the preceding norms, liberty and censure come hand in hand. In an alien land, they transform their lives and the lives of their immediate families (Pande v-vi).

Nimisha embraces America with all its discrimination and liberation and quits the hegemonic, male-oriented, and typecast motherland for the sake of emancipation. Juggling between the two worlds of nostalgia and survival, gradually she masters the role of a single mother in an alien land. Her daunting courage, unyielding will, and never-ending silence in the face of her daughter's eternal queries about India and her father come to her from her daily "shakti-puja" at home. She confirms the role of preserver of "traditions, heritage, continuity," while challenging the patriarchal "fixity" of timeless domesticity (McLeod, 2000, 245; Fadla and Awad, 2018, 170). Although the author has not offered her the role of the protagonist, her silence, strong will, her untold story of struggle in a foreign land, her transformation from a meek, submissive, and naïve woman to a confident and liberated person places her in the category of a powerful diasporic woman. Far from the narrow boundaries of her motherland, Nimisha attempts to reshape the destiny of her unborn child and chooses America as its foundation. She asserted, "Life with you would've been impossible in India. Here I can be independent. I made the right choice." (Chanani 155).

Conclusion

Nidhi Chanani in *Pashmina* has placed Nimisha in the backdrop of Indian society in the 1980s when delivering a child out of wedlock would result in discrimination and social ostracism. On the other hand, America provides her with professional, legal, and personal opportunities to carve a niche for herself and her daughter. Although Nimisha did not choose America for professional or monetary success as thousands of Indian immigrants do in pursuit of their American dream, her thirst for liberty, equality, and opportunity is well accomplished there.

However, the portrayal of women has traversed a phase of radical transformation over the last four decades. The traditional portrayal of self-sacrifice and subjugation of women in India has shifted to identity formation and self-respect (Landow, 1989, n.p.). These characters have intruded on the

power territories of the male-dominated workplace. They have boldly defied social hang-ups and cultural prohibitions (Parmar, 2018, 41). These are middle-class Indian women, more or less educated, or daily wagers who fight for their rights at home, at the workplace, and in public spheres. They are vocal about their salaries, pensions, and social, political, and religious rights. They can opt for late marriage or for remaining single because they can be happy without marriage (Narayanan, 2019, n.p.). Beginning with Kamala Markandya, up to now, Indian English literature has bravely witnessed the spurt of women writers boldly projecting the changing roles of contemporary Indian women (Parmar 41). In the words of Patricia Smacks, "There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries" (1989, 48). Rajeswari Sunder Rajan encapsulates the whole gamut of these women in a single phrase, "urban middle-class educated career women" (1993, 130). Dwyer calls it "a new Indian, professional, educated middle-class", which was "largely a creation of the new system of western style education system" (2000, 60).

Indian Women in the 21st century readily take up challenges in their constant battle to carve out an autonomous space for themselves. Nagaratna in K. R. Usha's *The Chosen*, Akhila in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, Moyna in Anita Desai's *The Rooftop Dweller*, and Nisha in Manju Kapur's *Home;* all these women have been portrayed as powerful, bold characters who willingly engage into grueling bargains and compromises that are not enforced on them—instead they choose to compromise (Lau, 2010, 285-86). Contrary to Nimisha in *Pashmina,* they earned self-fulfillment and economic independence in their homeland. Nimisha's self-imposed exile and her decision never to return to India must be considered in the light of that particular time frame in which she was placed. In modern India, Nimisha might have acted differently. With its diverse opportunities, today's India protects single and married women's legal and personal rights. The 21st-century Indian fiction, rather than portraying subordination and conformity in women, tells tales of conflicted female characters. Jerry Pinto's Em in *Em and The Big Hoom* and Gauri in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* are brilliant women who gave new dimensions to the age-old concept of motherhood. However, the concept of single motherhood is not new to Indian society. After all*, "*Sita is perhaps literature's first single mother who raises children to defeat a warrior like Ram" (Neelakantan, 2021, n.p.).

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