



REPRESENTATIONS OF NATION, GENDER AND
DIASPORA: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF SELECTED
PAKISTANI NOVELS IN ENGLISH

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(English Literary Studies)

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OCTOBER 2017

ABSTRACT

This study examines the reimagination of nation in terms of the gendered and the diasporic identities in six Pakistani novels in English. I examine the depictions of family, home and history in these novels and discuss the counter-histories that emerge as a means of questioning the nationalist narratives. This project contributes to discussion of the relationship between the nation, gender and diaspora and postcolonial novel in English. It explains that how postcolonial nationalism reconfigures understandings of the construction of the nation-state in an increasingly globalised world. In this study, I draw upon Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities and Homi Bhabha's concept that separate the idea of home from the unhomely or the uncanny. I examine how the novels reimagine nation in terms of the marginalised spaces and voices that include female subalterns, migrants and other less privileged members of society. I utilise Homi Bhabha's concept of third space to explore how the marginalised characters occupy the liminal spaces between the patriarchal controlled national, socio-political and economic spheres and the spaces of exclusion. I also draw upon the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardena, Uma Narayan, James Clifford and Roger Brubaker, to argue that these novels prompt a reconsideration of centralised patriarchal control in order to rethink a more inclusive national identity from feminist and migrant perspective. The six chapters of the study are organised chronologically according to publication dates of the novels by the three novelists under discussion. The first two chapters provide introduction, literature review and theoretical framework to set the ground for upcoming discussion. Chapter three focusses on the novels by Bapsi Sidhwa and examines that how the nation's identity of Pakistan is reimagined in terms of the hybridity of British/colonial and Pre-partition, local cultures, the Partition violence and the migrant identities. Chapter four explains how the representation of national history in Kamila Shamsie's two novels is both a forward and backward looking ambivalent process. In both the novels, nation is reimagined in terms of the feminist and migrant identities. The fifth chapter discusses the 'change' and 'transition' in the shifting modern life where the national identities are captured vis á vis the global citizenships as conceived in Mohsin Hamid's novels. The chapter six concludes this discussion and explains how the discussion of nation, gender and diaspora intersects with postcolonial discourse, to establish the relevance of Pakistani novel in English as a narrative of contemporary world.

ملخص البحث

إن التوابل والأعشاب التي تستخدم في الطهي بوصفها دواءً، قد اعتبرت مضادات للأكسدة نظرًا تبحث هذه الدراسة في إعادة التصور حول الأمة من حيث الهويات المستندة إلى نوع الجنس والشتات في ست روايات باكستانية مثل الأذان النامية بالإنجليزية والعروس الباكستانية والملح والزعفران، وكارتوجرافي، والعتة والدخان والأصولية المتوافرة فيها. إن دراسة تصوير الأسرة والمنزل والتاريخ في الروايات المختارة، ومناقشة التعداد - وتاريخها يظهر وسيلة للتساؤلات لدالروائين القوميين. يسهم البحث في مناقشة العلاقة بين الأمة وبين الجنسين في الشتات وتكونها في خطاب ما بعد الاستعمار؛ وهذا يفسر لنا النزعة القومية ما بعد الاستعمار، وكيف يعيد تكوين فهم للدولة القومية في عالم متزايد في العولمة. في هذه الدراسة، تلفت الباحثة النظر إلى الفكرة الوطن في ضوء أفكار بندكت أندرسون ومفهوم هومي بها للغريب التي تفصل بين من له وطن ومن ليس له وطن. إن النظر في كيفية إعادة تصور روايات الأمة يكون في المساحات المهمشة والأصوات التي تشمل الملازمين الإناث والمهاجرين وسائر أقل الأعضاء المميزين للمجتمع. تستفيد الباحثة من مفهوم هومي بها والمسافة الثالثة لاستكشاف كيفية احتلال الشخصيات المهمشة للمسافات في المجالات الوطنية والاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية التي تسيطر عليها باتريارتشالي والمسافات بين الاستبعاد والتهميش، كما تستعين بأعمال تشاندر تالبيد موهانتي وجاياواردينا كوماري وأوما نارايان بالقول بأن هذه الروايات موجهة إلى إعادة النظر في مركزية التحكم الأبوي من أجل إعادة التفكير في هوية وطنية أكثر شمولاً من منظور المهاجرين ومناصرة لحقوق المرأة. يتم تنظيم فصول الدراسة الستة زمنيًا؛ حيث رتبت حسب تواريخ النشر لروايات الروائين الثلاثة قيد المناقشة. يقدم الفصل الأول والثاني مقدمة واستعراضًا للكتابات والإطار النظري لوضع الأساس للمناقشة التي تلت ذلك. ويركز الفصل الثالث على روايات بابسي سيدهوا (١٩٣٨-)، ويدرس كيف يتم إعادة تخطيطها للحدثة الوطنية في باكستان فيما يتعلق بالثقافات المحلية والاستعمارية والعنف وهويات المهاجرين. ويبحث الفصل الرابع في كيفية تمثيل التاريخ الوطني في روايات كاميليا شمسل (١٩٧١) وهما رواياتان تبحثان في المقدمات والخلفيات للعمليات المتناقضة، وفي هاتين الروايتين ثمة إعادة لتخطيط الأمة فيما يتعلق بالمساواة بين الجنسين وهويات المهاجرين، وإعادة التصور لهما. يناقش الفصل الخامس "التغيير" و"الانتقال" في الحياة الحديثة للهويات الوطنية والتحويلات فيها التي تم التقاطها في أعمال محسن حامد (١٩٧١- حتى الآن). وأما الفصل السادس فختتم الدراسة بشرح كيفية مناقشة الأمة، ونوع الجنس والشتات المتقاطعة مع خطاب ما بعد الاستعمار، وهذه الروايات الباكستانية المختارة باللغة الإنجليزية هي الروايات المهمة التي تعيد التصور المميز للمجتمع الباكستاني بشموليته.

APPROVAL PAGE

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*This thesis is dedicated to my late father Kalimullah Shirazi for laying the foundation
of what I turned out to be in life*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All glory is due to Allah, the Almighty, whose Grace and Mercy have been with me throughout the duration of my program. Although, it has been tasking, His Mercies and Blessings on me ease the herculean task of completing this thesis.

I am most indebted to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Mohammad A. Quayum, whose enduring disposition, kindness, promptitude, thoroughness and friendship have facilitated the successful completion of my work. I put on record and appreciate his detailed comments, useful suggestions and inspiring queries which have considerably improved this thesis.

My gratitude goes to my beloved mother, Farida Shirazi without whose motivation and support this project could not be possible. I want to thank my brother Ovaisullah Shirazi, who financially helped me in funding my doctoral studies.

Once again, we glorify Allah for His endless mercy on us, which is enabling us to successfully round off the efforts of writing this thesis. Alhamdulillah.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Pakistan, as a nation-state, has completed its seventy years of independence. During this period, the state as well as Pakistani nation has encountered various ups and downs in the social, political and economic spheres. More recently, in various local, international, academic and media discussions, Pakistani literature in English has gained considerable attention. However, there are a number of aesthetic, historical and political factors that need consideration before the evaluation of the significance and role of Pakistani literature in English. This study is primarily concerned with the Pakistani novelists, writing in English, including Bapsi Sidhwa (1938-), Kamila Shamsie (1973-) and Mohsin Hamid (1971-), and their response to the issues of nation, gender and diaspora, framed within postcolonial discourse. This study will focus on how the discussion around nation, gender and diaspora highlights the problems existent in postcolonial state of Pakistan. In order to analyse the interaction between literature and postcolonial socio-political affairs of Pakistan, a brief analysis of its history and politics is required.

1.1.1 Major developments in the history of Pakistan

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the British colonial control over its colonies started weakening. Due to the emerging vulnerability of the Empire, there were resistance movements mobilised in the colonies. There was the rise of nationalism in Ireland, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-

8). These anti-imperialistic movements laid the foundation of political activism that followed. This anti-imperialism transformed into national consciousness that emphasised the significance of native cultures, traditions and identity against imperial and colonial values and culture. The aftermath of two World Wars in 1914-18 and 1939-45, further weakened British, French and Portuguese colonial control over their colonies.

In South Asia, which was one of the most significant of the British colonies, there was the establishment of an All Indian National Congress in 1885. The representation of Muslims in the Congress remained questionable due to the majority of Hindus in the party. Therefore, Muslim political leaders felt the need for representing the Muslims as a religiously and culturally distinct community. As a result, the All India Muslim League was founded in 1906. The political confrontation between the All India Muslim League and the All Indian National Congress increased as Congress claimed to be a sole representative of Indian Muslims as well as Hindus while Muslim League claimed to represent Muslims. This difference of political stance triggered the demand for a separate state for Indian Muslims, put forwarded in the 1930 session of the All India Muslim League. The atrocities inflicted on the Muslims after the victory of the All Indian Congress in the state elections of 1937, further established that Congress was not the only political force that represented the mutual interests of Muslims as well as Hindus (Sisson & Volpert, 1988, p. 285). Thus, in united India, as the resistance against British imperial rule triggered a negotiated transfer of power from the British to the locals, it also turned into a political liberationist and freedom movement that resulted in the creation of separate states of India and Pakistan in 1947.

1.1.2 Nationalist surge for self-definition and writing in English

As workable political communities, the nations emerging out of the anti-imperial resistance and freedom movements had to define themselves as culturally and religiously distinct groups. Literature played a significant role in carving this distinct national identity. The nationalist consciousness was reflected in the early writings by the writers in colonial India. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), Mulk Raj Anand (1906-2004), R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) and Raja Rao (1908-2006) emerged, who broke the monopoly of imperial literary establishment by articulating their own perceptions of native Indian cultural space and experience by writing in English as well as in regional languages. These writers, from the early anti-imperialist era, were resistant to the imperial values and they reconstructed the local cultural identity while recuperating from the damage incurred by colonial experience. However, in many instances, early anti-imperial writing adopted European genres of novel and short story, to represent the local culture. Therefore, there was also a constructive exchange between local writers, novelists and the imperial cultural forms of expression. The nationalist concerns, expressed in these indigenised narratives, set the ground for postcolonial narratives.

As the anti-imperialist nationalist politics gained momentum after the 1930s, the English language played a dual role as a language of the coloniser on the one hand, and on the other hand, as the language of the political discourse in which the demands for independence were negotiated with British. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), and Jawahar Lal Nehru (1889-1964) put forward their political negotiations in English. Therefore, when Pakistan got its independence in 1947, English held official status, with Urdu and

Bengali as state languages, in the 1956 constitution of Pakistan (Maloney, 1978, p. 148). This status of English as an official language remained significant in the nation building process in the post-independence years.

1.1.3 Colonial experience, nationalism and Postcolonial identity

Pakistani literature in English shares with other South Asian literatures in English such as, Indian and Bangladeshi literatures, colonial experience, the nationalist history as well as the need to decolonise the native sensibility. Pakistani literature in English also explores a distinct religio-cultural and historical dimension. This literature follows the nationalist pursuit of revisiting a rich historio-cultural background of Pakistan as a postcolonial state. This religio-cultural complexity in Pakistani literature in English is further matures into the postcolonial discussions about significant events, such as Pakistan movement, Partition, separation of East Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh in 1971.

From 1947 to 1980s, Pakistani novels in English were deemed, politically, less potent, within the larger corpus of Pakistani literature that also included Urdu poetry, Urdu novels and Urdu short stories. The Urdu literary voices of poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) and Ahmed Faraz (1931-2008) and Urdu fiction writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), Intezar Hussain (1923-) and Abdullah Hussain (1931-) were socio-politically more effective and influential because of their wider access to local people and localised literary idiom within which they wrote. They effectively addressed the national and political concerns of Pakistani society. They valiantly challenged and criticised the prevailing socio-political exploitation of the common man, through their writings. Thus, during the early decades of Pakistan's history, from 1950s to 1980s, the strong literary personalities dominated the literary

scene, which include Saadat Hasan Manto, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Quratulain Haider (1928-2007). Due to their presence, the socio-political concerns of national identity and national progress expressed in Pakistani novels in English remained undefined and unrecognised by the literary historians and critics.

Although postcolonial novel in English gained recognition only after 1980s, however, during the early post-Partition decades, there were scattered pieces of writing in English that discussed colonial era politics. Prominent names who wrote postcolonial novels were Ahmed Ali (1910-1994), Mumtaz Shahnawaz (1912-1948), Attia Hussain (1913-1998) and Zulfiqar Ghose (1935-). They showed a significant response to the politics of colonial India and also came forward with their distinct postcolonial perspective in their writings. They addressed the issues of nation, religious nationalism, religio-cultural distinction and gender discrimination in their writings. The earlier novels that narrated events from the pre-Partition era lamented the onset of violence during Partition and fragmentation in newly independent states of India and Pakistan. *The Heart Divided: A Novel* (1947) by Mumtaz Shahnawaz, *A Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh (1916-2014), *Aag ka darya*¹ (River of Fire) (1959) by Quratulain Haider, *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967) by Zulfiqar Ghose and *Ice Candy Man* (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa, are some of the examples of novels that critiqued Partition violence and the problems faced by the new Pakistani nation in the early years of independence.

Another important development in the nationalist and postcolonial history of Pakistani novel in English is the emergence of writings by the minority and migrant groups in the West (Shamsie M., 2005, p. 1). There is a strong sense of loss and gain

¹Aag ka Darya (River of Fire) is an Urdu novel, but it was translated into English by Umar Memon in 1998.

featuring in their writings. This sense of loss has originated from the diasporas' nostalgic experiences in foreign lands. These diaspora writers have expressed their sense of belonging to the new lands as well as to the homelands they left; thus revisiting and exploring the issues of identity. The most prominent name among Pakistani diaspora writers, is of Hanif Kureishi (1954) who discusses issues of identity and belonging in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and his memoir, *The Rainbow Sign* (1986). More recently, Tariq Ali (1943-), Qaisra Shahraz (1958-), Daniyal Moeenuddin (1963-), Mohammad Hanif (1964-), Nadeem Aslam Khan (1966-), Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie have emerged as the younger group of writers. These diaspora voices from Pakistani literature in English are unique in their treatment of the shifting national and transnational identities and gender issues of Pakistani society.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Relationship between literature and politics has always been an uneasy one. Literature, as an art form, questions and critically reflects the inequalities and disparities rampant in the society. In doing so, it challenges and questions the political domains and existing power establishments. As Pakistani novels in English responds to the political reality and social ills of Pakistani society, its influence as an effective social and political critique, is underestimated. Tariq Rehman highlights that one short coming of Pakistani novel in English, is that it imitates the British and imperial forms of narration as it uses the coloniser's language and forms of expression (1991, p. 226). He also points out that novels written by Pakistani writers in English are deemed insignificant as effective respondents to the socio-political problems of Pakistan. However, from 1980s onwards, the dynamics of Anglophone literature in

Pakistan and literary criticism related to it, underwent a transition due to the emergence of prominent Pakistani novelists writing in the English language. It is a point worth noticing that the prominent novelists in English were not non-existent in the early decades of Pakistani history. But, they remained unnoticed and their contributions remained unrecognised due to their limited readership, restricted mainly to English speaking elites in Pakistani urban quarters.

As Tariq Rehman compiled his *History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), he registered the presence of Pakistani novelists in English but could not detail their contribution to the national progress as significant postcolonial texts discussing the intersecting issues of nation, gender and diaspora. More recently, literary critics like Muneeza Shamsie and Cara Cilano revisit the contribution of Pakistani novel in English in the national and international literary discourse. They argue against the relegation of Pakistani novel in English to a depoliticised and non-influential background. According to Muneeza Shamsie, an overview of Pakistani novels in English, reveals that these works effectively address the social and political problems existent in Pakistan (2011, p. 191). Within the postcolonial discourse, these novels are active sources of carving the distinct national and cultural identity. Therefore, there is a need for an argument against the assumption that Pakistani novels in English are not strong contributors to national progress and the misperception that they are not politically potent voices, which address the national concerns of Pakistani people and aim to resolve them. By highlighting the representations of nation, gender and diaspora, as discussed in selected Pakistani novels by Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid, this study will establish these novels as effective postcolonial texts, that are politically vibrant and socially relevant. Sidhwa is recognised as a feminist and a Parsi writer in literary criticism related to *The Crow Eaters* (1978) and

The Pakistani Bride (1982) produced till today. Yet works by Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid being recent and new, need detailed analysis in terms of shifting national, gendered and diasporic identities, that are discussed in *Salt and Saffron* (2000), *Kartography* (2002), *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant fundamentalist* (2007).

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study will be limited to the works of Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To investigate the role of selected Pakistani novels in English as postcolonial narratives that incorporate national history and cultural identity while using English language and novel as a narrative form to decolonise native sensibility.
2. To analyse how these Pakistani novels in English explore the intersection between the issues of nation and nationalism and postcolonial discourse.
3. To analyse how Pakistani novels in English explore the interaction between the issues of diasporic and transnational identity as discussed in postcolonial discourse.
4. To analyse how Pakistani novels in English explore the issues of gender and feminism within the larger corpus of postcolonial discourse.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant as it investigates the relatively recent Pakistani novels in English written by Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid. It aims to fill the research gaps existent in the study of modern Pakistani literature in English by

analysing the unexplored, intersecting themes of national identity, gender and diaspora in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid. It will also help in gauging the evolution and transition of thought in Pakistan literary tradition in English from the last quarter of the twentieth century to the early decades of twenty first century. As this study analyses the more recent postcolonial novels such as *Salt and Saffron* and *Kartography* by Kamila Shamsie and *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, therefore it contextualises the novels within the more recent developments in literary criticism. For example, while discussing diaspora, it investigates the evolution of diaspora into transnational subcategories. Therefore, this study situates the recent texts within the microcosm of international migration and the shifting state borders in the globalised world. The study also contextualises the novels within the recent developments in gender studies and relocates the positions of male and female characters and their changing roles in the shifting national and transnational spaces.

The inclusion of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels along with those of the relatively young writers like Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid provides a balance between established and new novelists. Bapsi Sidhwa's novels reflect the pre-Partition era and early post-Partition circumstances and the cultural plurality in Pakistan. Kamila Shamsie represents the association between pre-Partition and post Partition religio-cultural and historical values, by focusing on the domestic units in the urban setup of Karachi in 1990s and 2000. Mohsin Hamid provides a more recent glocal perspective of Pakistani diaspora's vision as well as a localised view of Pakistan, in the new millennium. The study highlights the evolution of postcolonial identity as expressed in Pakistani novels in English. It also highlights the reimagined national, gendered and diasporic identities expressed in novels, which aim to emancipate and empower the

individuals in Pakistan and are representative of progressive cultural and political trends in changing times.

This study of Pakistani literary texts in English is a critical attempt to explore more deeply the ways in which Anglophone literary texts contribute in the reconstruction and conceptualisation of Pakistan as a modern postcolonial nation. It will refute the existent assumption that Pakistani literature in English is politically detached and is not well equipped to conceive a complete picture of Pakistani society due to its Anglophone origins. By the critical analysis of Pakistani novels in a postcolonial perspective, this study aims to redefine the role of Pakistan as a modern nation which aims to eradicate religious extremism and gender discrimination to achieve the goal of national progress.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This study has employed qualitative methods of research to achieve the objectives. It uses non-quantitative forms of data analysis such as opinions and attitudes to explain and establish a better understanding of the situations, cultures and individuals. It also employs theoretical approaches to validate the understanding of primary texts. For example, nation, gender and diaspora are used as non-quantitative variables to study the primary texts. This qualitative research uses theory, which as a set of interrelated variables or constructs, definitions and propositions presents an organized view of a particular phenomenon. The relationship between variables/constructs and primary texts is analysed to explain the phenomenon.

A close analysis of primary texts is conducted along with the secondary sources available on the socio-political and historical background of Pakistan. The social, political and historical contexts are worked out through journal material, author

interviews, conference proceedings, books and research studies related to socio-political history of Pakistan. The thesis has evolved as a historical, social and textual analysis of postcolonial writers, with focus on selected novels from Pakistani literature in English. The themes, plots and characters in the novels are the units of analysis that are framed within the intersecting socio-economic, political and literary theories and approaches.

1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 1: Introduction: The first chapter of the study comprises the introductory section that highlights the research problems and research objectives. It explores the scope of the study and mentions the primary and secondary texts that are used in the research process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This chapter provides an overview of the current critical discourse on the three writers and their works and also a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework within which the primary texts is contextualised.

Chapter 3: Subversion of colonial authority and ambivalent postcolonial national modernity in *The Crow Eaters* and *The Pakistani Bride*. It explains the replacement of primitive Zoroastrian traditions by colonial modernity, resulting hybridisation of religio-cultural Parsi identity, religious nationalism, gender bias and shifting migrant identities

Chapter 4: This chapter revisits the national history and reconstructs the new forms of home and belonging as conceived in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* and *Kartography*. It explains the reconstruction of national modernity in post-Partition Pakistan, issues of ethnic violence in Pakistan's national history, female subalterns

and hybrid identities resulting from Partition migration as framed in *Salt and Saffron* and *Kartography*.

Chapter 5: It is titled ‘ambivalent identities and liminal spaces: reconfiguration of national, gendered and diasporic identity in Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* and *the Reluctant Fundamentalist*’. This chapter explores the themes of intertwining homely and unhomely spaces in the urban quarters of Pakistan, gender inequality and temporality of national identity as discussed in *Moth Smoke*. It also works out the relational ideologies of nationalism and diaspora and the resulting fragmented identities as discussed in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Chapter 6: This chapter concludes how this thesis works out its objectives and studies the postcolonial relationship between the representations of nation, gender and diaspora in the selected Pakistani novels. .

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section one will review the literature already published discussing the six novels under discussion. As Pakistani novels in English are gaining attention in literary and academic circles, it is therefore significant to give a brief overview of literature related to the novels of Sidhwa, Shamsie and Hamid.

Section two will explain the theoretical framework within which the analysis of novel will be contextualised. It will explain postcolonial literary discourse that opens new vistas of cultural understanding. It will also explain how nation and nationalism are indispensable for understanding the ambivalence in postcolonialism. This section will elaborate the theoretical discussion about nation and imagination, nation and narration and an explanation of national bourgeoisie. It will further mature into a discussion of gender, history of feminism and the relevance of third world feminism as a pre-requisite for understanding postcolonial novels. It will also explain how the issues of nation and gender are intertwined in postcolonial discourse. The third part of the section two in this chapter will explain diaspora, types of diaspora, liminality, hybridity and the shifting cultural identities. It will also explain the relevance of South Asian diaspora, evolution and development in the concept of diaspora and its relationship to transnational feminism.