

New Lamps for Old: Diasporas Migrancy Borders

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It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. Indias of the mind.

(Rushdie, 1991;10)

This paper is about diasporas, nation-states and the self. It is about peoples whose selves are defined by real or imagined displacements, by self-imposed sense of exile or by the policies of a nation-state that lead to irredentist or separatist movements on the part of sections of its citizenry. The paper is about those people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passports. It is about people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen, but perhaps not press the hyphen too far for fear that this would lead to a massive communal schizophrenia. But, finally, it is also a celebration of diasporas as the exemplary condition of late modernity; diasporas as highly democratic communities for whom domination and territoriality is not the precondition of 'nationhood'. In this argument diasporic communities occupy the border zones of the nation where the most vibrant kinds of interaction take place, where the democratic ideal of the enlightened nation-state still comes into play and where ethnicity and the nation are kept separate. This does not, of course, mean that diasporas are unproblematic, ideal, social formations happy to live wherever there is an international airport; nor that diasporas should not function as collectives for purposes of self-empowerment or coalitional politics. As complex sites or communities, diasporas also have a reactionary streak in them; it is a streak that connects with the idea of the homeland or *desh* (in Hindi) against which all other lands are foreign or *videsh* (note that in Hindi *videsh* literally means 'non-desh' or other than one's country). But by and

large – and the establishment of a Jewish homeland is the exception and not the rule – diasporas do not establish homelands or return to one. When Idi Amin began to butcher Indians, they did not return to their Indian homeland, and throughout the dark years of South African apartheid few Indians (the Mahatma is the notable exception) returned to India. The act of displacement now makes diasporic subjects travellers on the move; their homeland is a series of objects, fragments of narratives that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases. Like hawkers they can reconstitute their lives through the contents of their knapsacks: a Ganapati icon, a dog-eared copy of the *Gita* or the *Quran*, an old *sari* or other *deshi* outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage or, in modern times, a video-cassette of the latest hit from the home country. Presented in this fashion this is a great, positive yarn, about extremely flexible human beings. But this version is only part of the story, as I have already hinted. To get my narrative right, to be able to say things about diasporas as exemplary as well as reactionary political conditions of late modernity I must tell a story about a diaspora whose multiple histories traverse both of these conditions. 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 centres of Europe, North America and Australasia. The old and the new Indian diasporas (as I would want to call them) together make up an exemplary instance of the positive and negative definitions of diasporas I have sketched so far. But the late modern (postmodern) world has also created hyper-mobile communities capable of interacting through airplanes, telephone, e-mail, the internet, video-cassettes, and so on. Indeed, 'homeland' is now available in the confines of one's bedroom in Vancouver, Sacramento or Perth. It is this story that I would want to tell with some of the privileges of the critical and self-reflexive native informant.

I was last in India to attend the marvellous 'Interrogating Post-colonialism' Conference held in October 1994. The conference coincided with the overdramatised rat plague but redeemed by the fact that it was held at the glorious summer seat of the Raj, the Shimla viceregal lodge. Designed by Henry Irwin, the architecture reminded me of a number of late nineteenth-century Oxford colleges. As a colonial from a faraway Indian diaspora steeped in everything British, the viceroy's lodge brought back memories of a culture that had been duplicated elsewhere though not on the same magnificent scale as in India where the British had to compete with the monuments of all the other conquerors. But it wasn't in Shimla that someone asked me the most searching question. This happened in Bombay, that post-colonial of all cities, the magical metropolis of Salman Rushdie though an early V.S. Naipaul may have captured the essence of Bombay better with the one-liner, 'Bombay you is a bitch'. Here in this city the colonial porter of the Radio Club did not mince words when he welcomed

me with the customary, 'Where are you coming from?' I explained to him in earnest my history, my origin in the sugar plantations of Fiji, the fact that, though a Brahmin (my surname gave that away) I was basically working class, and had my forebears not left the Indo-Gangetic Plains in the nineteenth century I would probably be illiterate and begging in Allahabad. But it is only now, as I write that encounter, that I realise the meaning of 'Where are you coming from?' Translated back into Hindi (*ap kahan se aye hai*) the question does not seek a full autobiography, but is instead only a means of 'locating' you because in India you are where come from, and that may also mean the caste to which you belong, the family you married into and whether you may now be able to find a niche in the labyrinth that is Bombay. In Fiji – the first of my diasporic homes – 'Where are you coming from?' is rephrased as 'Where are you staying?' (*o vaka tikotiko mai vei*). But staying is not the here and now place of residence. It carries with it, as in the original meaning of the Hindi question, the more specific sense of ancestral village or, in Fijian, one's *koro*. One may live in another place for generations but the answer given to '*o vaka tikotiko mai vei*' is always the name of one's *koro*. In pre-1987 Fiji (that is in Fiji before Rabuka's coup) Fijian Indians too would answer this question by referring to their plantation village, i.e. the plantation to which their forefathers came in the first instance. After 1987 the indigenous Fijian prefixed, though without marking it linguistically, the phrase '*Kai Idia*' ['*kai Idia*' (*you from India*)] where are you coming from?). Ask the question too often in any nation-state and you begin to produce the schizophrenic social and psychological formations of diasporas. A diasporic double consciousness comes to the fore once, as I believe Sartre observed, you link this question, finally, to the presumed ultimate solution of diasporas: 'What do we do with them now?' In Bombay where inter-communal relationship remained tense last year, this question had indeed been asked with reference to the Indian Muslim community. As a student of diasporas I could see how easily real or implied principles of exclusivism could diasporise a community that had begun to be read ambivalently ever since the partition of India in 1947 created a Muslim homeland with a fanciful name ('the land of the pure'). I also began to feel that what Indian literary/cultural theorists needed was not a vague 'postcolonial' theory but a form of diasporic analysis that would use, to rephrase Lata Mani's argument, a rigorous politics of translation to transcode as scrupulously as one could all the specificities of communal experience. (Lata Mani, 1992: 3923)

Even though the establishment of a homeland is not essential to 'the cultural logic' of diasporas (Israel, and the Tamil Elam movement in Sri Lanka are exceptions to the rule) it must be conceded that 'homeland' figures prominently in the psychic imaginary of diasporas. Hindi news from India on SBS radio in Australia always refer to the news as *desh ki khabar* ('news from *deshs*' where *desh* is unmarked as a country and can be translated as 'Homeland'). India alone as *desh* is unnamed, every other country including Australia is named in the news bulletin. It is this

pervasiveness of a special homeland discourse that led William Safran (Safran, 1991: 83-99) to define diasporas in terms of six characteristics linked to two invariables: exile and homeland. These characteristics are: (1) dispersal of people or their ancestors from a centre to two or more peripheries, (2) the retention of collective memory vision, or myth about the original homeland – its physical location, history, etc., (3) a feeling of non-acceptance, alienation or insulation in the host society, (4) a strong feeling that their ancestral homeland is their true, ideal home and the place to which they or their descendants would or should eventually return, (5) a responsibility for the maintenance of the homeland or its restoration, and (6) a self-conscious definition of one's ethnicity in terms of the existence of this homeland. It is not too difficult to transpose these characteristics onto definitions of the ethnic (*ethnie*). (Smith, 1986) And it is for this reason that Safran's characteristics do not take into account precisely those points at which ethnicity and diasporas part company. Where ethnic doctrines are based on ideas of exclusivism and purity, and linked to a religiously based communal solidarity endorsed by the priestly caste, diasporic epistemology locates itself squarely in the realm of the hybrid, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes. What is clear, for instance, is that the homelands of diasporas are themselves contaminated, they carry racial enclaves, unassimilative minorities and other discrepant communities within their body and are not pure, unified spaces in the first place. And even in the Jewish case history that underpins Safran's analysis, migration was largely from one in-between stage to another and not from Palestine to a new land. The model of centre-periphery is somewhat suspect from the start. Furthermore, historically Jewish homelands had been created wherever Jews had settled, in parts of the Middle East, in Poland and so on. Many Jews looked upon these enclaves as their homelands rather than to the imaginary Israel of the *Tarah*. Though Jewish history also gives us the only successful instance of diaspora nationalism, a term that Ernest Gellner uses to define a third species of nationalism beyond the Enlightenment/democratic and the eugenic (Gellner, 1983: 101-109), the lived experience of the Jews was not necessarily linked to a physical return to a homeland which, at any rate, is only possible with the return of the Messiah as the members of the *Neturei Karta* maintain in Israel itself. It is thus the creation of its own political myths rather than the real possibilities of a return to a homeland that is the defining characteristic of diasporas. In a progressively multi-ethnic conception of the nation-state (in spite of the tragedy of the Balkan states and the break-up of the Soviet union, which was a nation-state only through the politics of coercion) it is diasporic theory that bears testimony to the fact that we live in a world 'where multi-ethnic and multi-communal states are the norm' (Hobsbawm, 1992: 179). The partition of India, the demand of the Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka, and the current round of racial cleansing in the Balkan states are very special, indeed aberrant cases. The memorial (and fictive) reconstructions of the ancient Jewish homeland, of the Armenian

golden age in the era of the early Gregorian church, of the free city-state of Ayodhya under the epic hero Rama or of the community of the faithful under Prophet Muhammad become the sublime signs of the ungraspable in the complex psychology of diasporas. Against this kind of discursive economy the material history of diasporas designate deterritorialised peoples with a history and future. This future is the affirmation of the idea of the Enlightenment/democratic nation-state currently threatened by racialised ethnic states. For the fact is, as E.J. Hobsbawm writes so lucidly: 'Wherever we live in an urbanised society, we encounter strangers: uprooted men and women who remind us of the fragility or the drying up of our own families' roots'. (Hobsbawm, 1992: 173)

The Jewish diaspora is the fundamental ethnic model for diasporic theory and all serious study of diasporas will have to begin with it. But what we must now do is to take away from that model its essentialist, regressive and defiantly millenarian semantics and reread it through alternative models much more attuned to spatio-temporal issues and its own discourses of disruption and discontinuity in the mosaic of history. In this argument the Jewish experience is a sign that is both history's conscience and its allegory of the democratic nation-state. (Boyarin and Boyarin, 1993: 693-725) We place under erasure a narrative that requires, at every point, a theory of homeland as a centre that can either be reconstituted (as it actually happened with the creation of Israel) or imaginatively offered as the point of origin and replace it with a narrative of social interaction in the border zones of the nation-state. A people without a homeland is not an aberration, but a prefigured cultural 'text' of late modernity. In other words, the positive side of diaspora (as seen in the Jewish experience) is a democratic ethos of equality that does not privilege any particular ethnic community in a nation; its negative side (which is a consequence of its millenarian ethos of return to a homeland) is virulent racism and endemic nativism. This is not to say that the Jews did not suffer in enlightened nation-states; nor should the argument be seen as a denial of the right to self-determination. What the argument does is to emphasise that the religious fossilisation of the community (vide Anthony D. Smith) is not its permanent condition. What the community undergoes is a process of social semiosis whereby the tribe from a particular 'homeland' interacts with other cultures over a long period of time to produce a diaspora. Against the fictions of a heroic past and a distant land, the real history of diasporas is always contaminated by the social processes that govern their lives. Indeed, the autochthonous pressures within diasporas discussed in the writings of Gellner, Smith and Safran are of concern to them only when a morally bankrupt nation-state asks the question, 'What shall we do with them?' The unfortunate thing is that the question has been asked far too often (the holocaust is the most obscene instance of the consequences of such a question) and continues to be asked even now. A recent example of this happened in Fiji when soon after the military coup of 1987 the indigenous Fijians very loudly asked precisely this question of its own Indian

diaspora. Though the myth of autochthony is less marked in other diasporas (recall, however, that as recently as the nineteenth century the Boers in fact created a mythology to legitimate their own great trek inland) it is nevertheless one that is always at the heart of nativist definitions of diasporas. But that's where it should stay – in the political imaginary of the people – because the establishment of a real homeland is always a denial of the dynamics of diasporas and in fact subverts it radically democratic ethos. Thus to use a phrase from Boyarin and Boyarin out of context I will argue that diaspora consciousness is a 'consciousness of a racial collective as one sharing space with others, devoid of exclusivist and dominating power'. (Boyarin and Boyarin, 1993: 713) As the exemplary condition of late modernity, diasporas 'call into question the idea that a people must have a land in order to be a people'. (Boyarin and Boyarin, 1993: 718) Of course the danger here is that diasporas may well get romanticised as the ideal social condition (though many multicultural nations must come to terms with it) in which communities are no longer persecuted. As long as there is a fascist fringe always willing to find racial scapegoats for the nation's own shortcomings and are willing to chant 'Go home – ' the autochthonous pressures towards diasporic racial exclusivism will remain. To address real diasporas does not mean that the discourses that have been part of diaspora mythology (homeland, ancient past, return and so on) will disappear overnight. Again we must not overlook the power of the political imaginary in diasporic narratives.

Against linear temporality and unproblematic remembrances in diasporic theory, we must be concerned with what Paul Gilroy has referred to as 'the flows, exchanges, and in-between elements that call the very desire to be centred into question'. (Gilroy, 1992-190) We must go to scattered global diasporas of a particular race – Chinese, African, Indian, Armenian, Greek, Meghrebi, etc. – to map out the intercultural, transnational spaces occupied by them along the lines of Gilroy's magisterial study of the 'Black Atlantic'. (Gilroy, 1993) The upshot of such an approach is that it would foreground an important spatio-temporal characteristic of diasporas. Diaspora time, which, as Gilroy suggests, is linked to the concepts of 'scatter' and 'evolution', now parts company with the time of the Motherland in which originary concepts are still used. In Gilroy's narrative of the 'Black Atlantic' the key to a spatial focus is a shift to the spatial chronotope of the passage itself. The ship, the medium of mercantile capitalism, is the first of the cultural units in which social relations were re-sited and renegotiated. In the case of the old Indian diaspora, it produced a site in which caste purities were largely lost (after all the crossing of the dark ocean, the *kalapani*, signified the loss of caste) as well as a new form of socialisation that went by the name of *jahaji-bhai* (ship-brotherhood). Another spatial connection in this old diaspora is through the uniform nature of the food eaten. Since food rations on the sugar plantations were identical for all indentured Indian labourers, food linked the old Indian diaspora from Surinam to Mauritius to Fiji. The weekly ration was made up of rice, *dhal*, sugar, tea, dried fish, *atta*

(sharps), salt, oil and half a pound (about 250 grams) of mutton on weekends. The pattern of daily meals based on these rations was as follows:

Ist meal: black tea, *roti* with fried or curried vegetables or a *chokha* (cooked aubergines)

Midday meal: boiled rice with *dhal* and *bhaji* (vegetables)

Evening meal: *roti* and *tarcari* (curry) with black tea

Midday meals (weekends): usual midday meal with fish and/or mutton

Even though linguistic homogeneity (in the indentured diaspora everyone spoke a version of the Hindi dialect Bhojpuri at one stage) is no longer a unifying characteristic of this diaspora, food certainly is. The old Indian plantation diaspora still eats the same kind of food cooked in much the same way. I suspect that this is a direct consequence of their meagre weekly food rations that was identical throughout the sugar colonies. There is a particular food called *dhal-puri* that is made of *dhal* (lentils) placed in between two layers of sharp rolled into a large *roti* or pancake, like a *fajita*, that clearly grew out of the limited culinary combinations possible on a staple diet based on their weekly rations. In Trinidad the *dhal-puri* is sold in shops called 'Bust Up Shut' because, as they explain in Trinidad, when you crumple a *dhal-puri* in your hand, it opens up. The move from *dhal-puri* to 'bust up shut' is part of the larger process of creolisation or hybridisation that leads to interracial interactions between diasporas. In this case between the Blacks and Indians of Trinidad. As a fast food available in the 'Bust Up Shut' shops, the *roti* is an 'essential item on social/festive occasions irrespective of ethnicity'. (Sammy, n.d.) What one begins to see is the fluid nature of exchange and the immense social mobility of a culture-specific food. It is precisely this fluidity – and the contaminated/contaminative space occupied by the Indian diaspora and diasporas generally – that makes essentialist readings of diasporic histories (readings along regressive nationalist lines) so difficult to understand.

Diasporic cultural identity is therefore, by its very nature predicated upon the inevitable mixing of castes and peoples. The interactions during the lengthy sea voyages began a process that led to the remaking of cultural and ethnic identities along the lines suggested by Louis Hartz's analysis of European settler colonies in Australia, Africa and the Americas. (Hartz, 1964; Hodge and Mishra, 1991) These processes never come to a standstill in diaspora cultures; they continue to permeate all aspects of diasporic life. Since cultural situations are not fixed but mobile, since cultures travel and become contaminated in the process, a nativist (millenarian) discourse must be rewritten through a theoretically aware and critically self-reflexive diasporic discourse. It is not simply a matter of re-articulating the past as though this is how it really was – the danger here is that one begins to repeat racist or nativist discourses of cultural anteriority and superiority which emphasise lost glories (myths replacing history) – but a matter of radically

reinterrogating the actual experience of plantation life on cotton, tobacco and sugarcane fields. In re-reading one's past one creates not so much timeless narratives but uses real, material experiences as a 'means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger (Benjamin)'. (Gilroy, 1993: 187)

Diasporic space as the space of the border, a space that is always contaminated, now engenders the possibilities of exploring hybrid, cross-cultural and interdiasporic relationships. (Mishra, 1995a) Note, for instance, the impact on British Asian Bhangra (derived from a Punjabi folk form) of Caribbean reggae and the soul and hip hop styles of Black Africa, which are in themselves highly complex hybrid music, and of Bombay film music. The music of Apache Indian, though already under fire from the 'Asian Cool' scene in Britain (Morris, 1994), is a case in point here. Asian bands such as KKKings, Fun'Da'Mental and Kaliphz are further evidence of Gilroy's persuasive argument that cultural commodities travel swiftly, criss-crossing geographical boundaries, creating new and vibrant forms. Black reggae and rap music exemplifies this kind of cross-fertilisation though between it and white rock and punk there has been no easy synthesis of these two languages because each has been 'imprisoned within its own irreducible antinomies'. (Hebdige, 1970: 70) But this does not disprove Gilroy's thesis which is really about trans-diasporic identifications; nor does it disprove that diasporic cultural forms 'are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments'. (Clifford, 1994: 307) Recently in the British Indian-Pakistani diaspora even classical forms such as the Sufi *qalandari* dance and singing have been crossed with contemporary music. The best instance of this is Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's quite extraordinary rendition of '*dama dam mast qalandar mast mast*'. The 'Black Atlantic' is perhaps the most obvious case of this phenomenon but cassette/video/compact disc culture has also affected a similar kind of cross-fertilisation between other homelands and their diasporas. The Bhojpuri-Hindi songs of the Indian singers Babla and Kanchan combine Hindi film music with calypso/soca. Kanchan's mid-80's hit '*kaise bani*', for instance, was originally written and performed by the Trinidadian-Indian calypsonian Sunder Popo, composer of the famous '*Nana Nani*' calypso that took the old Indian diasporas by storm in the late 70's. (Manuel, 1993: 191) In Surinam the Indian diaspora combines rock, soca, k-dance, reggae, rap and bobbling with the folk songs of rural India in the music of Kries Ramkhelawan and Anita Qemrawsing.

By way of a somewhat lengthy conclusion I would want to spell out the implications of the foregoing theorisation on the study of the Indian diaspora. In my own earlier writings (Mishra, 1977, 1990, 1992) I had read the Indian diaspora through theories of fossilisation and regressive millenarianism in which the centre-periphery model was given priority. I have now moved away from that narrow (though theoretically very neat) position to one in which I would want to make distinctions between the old and the new diasporas but would wish to maintain that the ideology of the

homeland and the discourses of nativism, exclusivism or irredentism are never erased and do become enabling discourses whenever the diasporic community is, for whatever reasons, under threat. Thus is the Rushdie Affair the Subcontinental Muslim diaspora in Britain and elsewhere retreated into its racialised discourses of religious purity and cultural difference. At the same time I would not want the recent politics of ethnic difference in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its East European satellite states to be read as indicating a shift away from nation-states to ethnic-states. Within nation-states based on an 'imagined' geographical entity linked to the Enlightenment's democratic ideals (Anderson, 1991), the diaspora should feel no threat of expulsion; from the ethnic state it must fear the possibilities of ethnic cleansing. Diasporas have flourished whenever the former, in whatever guise, has been the guiding principle of the nation-state. In retheorising diasporas I am agreeing with E.J. Hosbawm that this will continue to be the case.

To explore the narrative of the Indian diaspora critically, we must keep in mind the fact that it is best to see the Indian diaspora as two relatively autonomous archives that can be designated by the terms 'old' and 'new'. The old (that is, more specifically, nineteenth-century indenture) and the new (that is late modern) traverse two quite different kinds of topographies. The subjects of the old occupy spaces in which they interact, by and large, with other post-colonial peoples with whom they have a complex relationship of power and privilege as in Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam; the subjects of the new are people who have turned to the metropolitan centres of Empire or to other white settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US.¹ There are, of course, Indians in other parts of Africa, in Sri Lanka and in Malaysia. The last two constitute a special case of the Tamil Indian diaspora that needs to be theorised through specific historical research that I have not been able to enter into at this stage. The non-South African Indian diaspora is by and large a diaspora of Gujarati free traders about whose history I lack the necessary historical expertise.

The proof texts of the foregoing argument is to be found in the creative imagination of the writers of the Indian diaspora. I do not have the space here to demonstrate this argument fully and can only summarise analyses I have undertaken elsewhere. (Mishra, 1995a; Mishra, 1995b) The founding discourse of the old Indian diaspora is to be found in the writings of V.S. Naipaul, notably in *A House for Mr Biswas* (Naipaul, 1961) where the idea of India exists in the minds of the diaspora through forms of spatial

¹The South Asian ('Indian') diaspora is conservatively estimated at 9 million: Europe 1,500,000 (1,300,000 in Great Britain), Africa 1,400,000 (1,000,000 in South Africa), Asia 2,000,000 (1,200,000 in Malaysia), Middle East 1,400,000 (largely guest workers in the gulf States), Latin America and the Carribean 1,000,000 (largely in Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam), North America 1,200,000 (9,00,000 in the US), the Pacific 4,50,000 (300,000 in Fiji). These figures, slightly modified, have been taken from Benedict Anderson, 1994: 326-327, fn 23.

displacement in which the originary sacred sites of India are transformed into the local. (Ghosh, 1989: 73-78) This form of transference/transformation of space means that India gets internalised and then projected on to another geographical space without so much as a hint of dissonance. The fixities of the epic (an absolute point of reference, a past that cannot be duplicated but only extensively remembered) in the diaspora undergo a whole series of displacements that result in the construction of new sites as metaphors of India. The source text of the originary symbols is, however, not the text of Sanskrit high culture but 'degraded' epic fragments from the *Ramacaritamansa* of Tulsidasa as memorially reconstructed by the indentured labourers. Consequently, the grand Indian epic itself gets written out in the 'infinitely reproducible space' of Hanuman House in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The mobility of the space of India, and its reconstructions through acts of pseudo-sacralisation (after Mircea Eliade) explains why the classical linear narrative of return one associates with the Jewish diaspora is replaced by a spatio-temporal dimension in which the Tulsi house aspires to the lost 'condition' of India while at the same time replicating that space. Centres and peripheries – motherlands and diasporas – thus enter into relationships of mutual reinforcement as well as uncanny displacement. This hawker-like capacity to carry one's ancestral baggage around, this capacity for re-spatialisation, however, needs to be tempered by an account of the strong reverse millenarian trend, the double consciousness, of the old Indian diaspora. Even when political hegemony has been solidly achieved as in Mauritius, where the Indian diaspora has ruled the island state since independence in the sixties, there remains such a powerful push to rewrite history, to recast the creolised, hybridised, patois life of the island into the mould of the homeland. A recent conference in Mauritius titled 'Indian Diaspora' had only two speakers who were from Indian diaspora outside of Mauritius.² The vast bulk of the invited guests of around 100 were all from India. And the agenda of the conference was not diaspora as a vibrant social formation but the manner in which Mauritius can now retrieve Indian values (and this meant the values of the Hindi-speaking North) to replace their hybridised Indian-French-English culture.

The engendering of culture as mobile artefacts of the mind, and its 're-siting' in the hearts of darkness, is being presented here not as a specifically Hindu phenomenon (a good 10% of the labourers were Muslims), but as a specific mode of articulating the past and reinvigorating it. To create a new locale for purposes of investing the old with new meaning is the spatial equivalent of rupturing imperial history through the diasporic, where the *Samvat* (the Hindu calendar) or the *Hijra* (the Islamic calendar) begins with the passage across the seas. But V.S. Naipaul brings the space of the ships and

²International Conference on the Indian Diaspora', Mahatma Gandhi Institute/Human Service Trust, Mauritius, 21-23 August 1993

the memory of the passage into the Tulsi household itself though not through any contextual remembrance of the event. Instead the Indian past exists through the rituals of eating and religion, through the names of the characters and through an extended family structure that insulates the community. But what this leads to is not a pure literary genre but to the hyphenated genre of a tragi-comedy. The title of the novel, one needs reminding, is not the epic 'The Song of Mr Biswas' nor 'The Banishment of Mr Biswas' but the spatialised house that Mr Biswas finally owns. But Amitav Ghosh's spatial displacement does not necessarily mean that India is, therefore, completely erased as local symbols overtake those of the Motherland. On the contrary, strong millenarian world-views remain. Conflating nativism and the idea of the sacred, millenarian world-views steadfastly refuse contamination and hybridity: everything has to be reimaged through concepts of purity. In the old Indian diaspora the Hindus even created the *Ramayana* (Tulasidasa's version) as the book for the Hindu diaspora when in fact Hinduism has no one book, it is polytheistic in every sense of that word. But to accept myths as fact (as present-day Mauritian Indians are trying to do through cultural amnesia) is to forget that diasporic communities are always hyphenated: notice the hyphenated ethnicities of the Fiji-Indian, the Trinidadian-East Indian, the Mauritian-Indian, etc. The hyphen is that which signifies the vibrant social and cultural spaces occupied by diasporas in nation-states. It also reminds us of the contaminated, border, hybrid experience of diaspora people for whom an engineered return to a purist condition is a contradiction in terms because when they returned to the quay their ships had gone:

He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut-out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveller has lived out his life. (Naipaul, 1987: 92)

Naipaul's indentured forebears discovered this in Trinidad; their ships had also disappeared and they were left stranded on an island off the coast of Venezuela. In Naipaul's case the ship always disappears upon each arrival and even though the 'familiar temporariness' persists there is no hope of return. For Naipaul, as for the diaspora itself, 'the Enigma of Arrival', Chirico's version as well as his own meditation on the theme, is all about journeys and ships, it is about our first journeys after which there are no other: it is about later journeys parodying earlier ones:

... that journey back to England so mimicked and parodied the journey of nineteen years before, the journey of the young man, the boy almost who had journeyed to England to be a writer, in a country where the calling had some meaning. ... (Naipaul, 1987: 95)

For diasporic reconstruction, the past cannot be forgotten through an act of willed amnesia; but the ship has gone, and the diasporic subject must now re-map the new space, master the landscape and ensure, as Patrick White wrote of Voss, that the land can become one's own by right of vision. If there is humanist pathos in this, it is intentional because the final words of Naipaul in *The Enigma of Arrival* insinuate as much: 'And that was when, faced with a real death, and with this new wonder about men, I laid aside my drafts and hesitations and began to write very fast about Jack and his garden.'

In an earlier novel Naipaul had written, again very fast, about the diasporic experience as a moment in parenthesis before one made it to the metropolitan centre. I have in mind his heavily discursive and profoundly meditative work called *The Mimic Men*. (Naipaul, 1967) This work is about the double exile of diasporic peoples, first as immigrants to the island of Isabel, and second as political rejects to Britain. In the process of writing out the parenthesis, Ralph Singh, stranded in a London hotel with his luggage and 50,000 pounds in cash, can only rememorate a life that is hyphenated, rent asunder, fissured and fractured. But on the Island itself – on the island of the old Indian diaspora in fact – there were a finite number of hyphenated subjects unlike the multicultural world of the new where the Indian diaspora is one among many. In the new Indian diaspora hyphenated subjects become like an alphabet soup as Kamala Visweswaran has pointed out. (Visweswaran, 1994) In this soup an ABCD is an 'American-Born-Confused-Deshi', an ABC an 'American-Born-Chinese' and so on. However, in this alphabet-oriented identity politics, Kamala Visweswaran's own personal intervention is worth noting. Speaking about her upbringing (Indian father, American WASP mother) she adds, 'Although English was my mother tongue, I cannot bring myself to call it my mother tongue'. (Visweswaran, 1994: 117) This denaturalisation of the mother tongue, as a political act (since her mother is in fact white), is a very recent phenomenon, and one that is linked to the identity crisis of the new Indian diaspora. It is directly related to a failure to carve for themselves a new language (such as Fiji Hindi) or participate fully in a language to which one has made historical contributions (Mauritian French patois, West Indian Creole, for instance). A passage cited by Kamala Visweswaran from *The Satanic Verses* may be repeated here:

'There was a TV reporter here some days back', George Miranda Said. 'Pink Hair. She said her name was Kerleeda. I couldn't work it out.'

'Listen, George is too unworldly,' Zeeny interrupted. 'He doesn't know what freaks you guys turn into. That Miss Singh, outrageous. I told her, the name's Khalida, dearie, rhymes with Dalda, that's a cooking medium. But she couldn't say it. Her own name. Take me to your kerleader. You types got no culture. Just wogs now. Ain't it the truth? she added, suddenly gay and round-eyed, afraid she'd gone too far. 'Stop bullying him, Zeenat,' Bhupen Gandhi said in his quiet voice. And George, awkwardly, mumbled: 'No offence, man. Joke-shoke.' (Rushdie, 1988: 54)

In India difficult, and not so difficult, names are easily anglicised, Zeenat into Zeeny, Jamshed into Jumpy and so on. In the diaspora, difficult Indian names are affectionately maintained but consistently mispronounced. George's 'Joke-shoke' is very Indian, Miss Singh's 'Kerleeda' is totally diasporic. The play on words in the border-zones of diasporic experience – an alterity that is never a totality – is the ultimate sign of the complex ways in which the refashioning of selves occurs in diasporas. The 'over-there' (a perverse image of the anthropologist's 'being there') is pure imaginary, and erupts through a self-naming that has no equivalent in the language from which the name has been taken. One returns to the semantics of the hyphen, that sign which in Hartman's deconstructive utterance (Hartman, 1980: 126) is the hymen-hyphen that connects as well as divides: the hyphen, in short, personifies the diaspora.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* the hyphen negotiates what the eponymous Jasmine sees as the rhetorical space of Mrs Ripplemeyer's 'Out There' versus 'In Here'. (Mukherjee, 1989: 21) The hyphen makes rebirthing and coalitional politics possible even as the words around the hyphen pretend to claim otherwise though there is no guarantee that cross-diasporic affiliations would necessarily advance and not inhibit political coalitions. Bharati Mukherjee maps out a world in which diasporic identities are also 'illicit' identities on the run (if they are illegal) or rent apart because the homeland is both a memory and a very real fact whose images are present in our homes thanks to video-cassettes and CNN news. In other words, the schismatic break with India in the old diaspora is replaced by the idea of a homeland that is always present visibly and aurally (through video-cassettes, films, tapes and CDs). The old diaspora broke off contact – few descendants of indentured labourers know their distant cousins back in India – the new renews contact because immigration policies favour family reunion. The old Indian diaspora marks itself off as an historical fact as landless people become footnotes to an imperial history. The old Indian diaspora marks itself off as an historical fact as landless people become footnotes to an imperial history. The people of the new Indian diaspora, recounts Mukherjee, are of a different order:

But we are refugees and mercenaries and guest workers; you see us sleeping in airport lounges; you watch us unwrapping the last of our native foods, unrolling our prayer rugs, reading our holy books, taking out for the hundredth time an aerogram promising a job or space to sleep, a newspaper in our language, a photo of happier times, a passport, a visa, *laissez-passer*. (100-101)

There are names mentioned, countries, airports: the Middle-East, Sudan, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Paramaribo, Florida. Unmarked jumbos, leaking trawlers, the modern and the Conradian in a journey out of one heart of darkness into another. In her works people of the Indian diaspora are part of

a global odyssey as they renegotiate new topographies through the travails of travel. For women, in particular, the collective horror of a double oppression present in the old (from overseers on sugar plantations as well as from their own men) is replaced by the constant abuse of their bodies as illegal migrants. Thus even as Jasmine adopts the discourse of romance to smother over her own fractured life – 'I think maybe I am Jane with my very own Rochester . . . (Mukherjee, 1989: 236) – we cannot fail to recall the narrative of Mr Rochester's first wife Bertha, the Creole, who is imprisoned in the attic. In referring to Mr Rochester here Jasmine defines her role as the compassionate Jane when, for many women of the diaspora, their subjectivity is always veiled as they enter into a sexual politics in which their bodies cannot claim public possession of their husbands. Thus Mukherjee censors her intertext by excluding from it the Gothic narrative of horror. Instead, the story of Jane and Mr Rochester is presented as the positive narrative of the hyphen which, in Mukherjee's words, should not be questioned too hard.

In the Tulsi household Biswas felt alienated but the diaspora acted out its own history because this diaspora had become a defining characteristic of the island state. After all, diasporic identifications are a crucial part of life in Trinidad. Against this, in North America the Indian diaspora (or for that matter any other diaspora of colour) as represented in *Jasmine* is not an element through which the Canadian or American nation-state either defines or represents itself. In the absence of a capacity to theorise its position, in America the Indian diaspora can only retreat into its apartments or houses to act out the fantasies of living here and belonging elsewhere. Indian mail-order brides, living in the same block of apartments, watching B grade Bombay movies but at the same time keeping many of the caste and linguistic divisions of India intact are familiar features of this diaspora. The fragile unity of India, its contradictory cosmopolitanisms, give way to fierce indifference here as lives are lived in 'an unlivable land across oceans'. (Mukherjee, 1989: 153)

The unlivable is broached in Mukherjee's work through the gap or the hyphen. What is of real interest in this novel is the problematic, yet sometimes creative, nature of the hyphen occupied by Jasmine as she comes to terms with her Indian- (Asian-) American self which, in America, is as yet not a recognisable cultural syntax ('don't question either half too hard' says *Jasmine* towards the end of the novel. [Mukherjee, 1989: 225]). Her mother-in-law, Mrs Ripplemeyer, of course, respects difference but in the process eschews the logic of the hyphen in favour of old style binarism:

"Think how many people thirty-five dollars will feed out there."
 Out there. I am not sure what Mother imagines. On the edge of the world, in flaming deserts, mangled jungles, squelchy swamps, missionaries save the needy. Out There, the darkness. But for me, for Du, In Here, safety. At least for now. (21)

'Out There' is the amorphous, unspecified terrain of the third world, wretched, in need of food. American charity is for the 'Out There.' 'In Here' security. Once you are 'In Here,' 'Out There' (which was your starting point) becomes equally alien. How to make 'Out There' less stereotypical, what strategies of cultural survival would make the 'Out There' also the 'In Here,' part of a continuum of growth not broken up into the dichotomies of the out and in? Jasmine is the 'Out There' in the 'In Here' geography of Iowa. Much of post-colonial theory is the 'Out There' located in the space of 'In Here'. When the 'Out There' becomes part of the 'In Here' it continues to be misinterpreted by those who have always been 'In Here'. Thus in the section where the American wants to learn from Jasmine about Sanskrit (because the 'In Here' assumes that the 'Out There' are native informants of their culture) Jasmine notes, 'For them, experience leads to knowledge, or else it is wasted. For me experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill'. (33) The past has to be deflected on to something else, it can no longer be a repository, as source of memory if you are an illegal migrant (an under-privileged group within a group). For the legals, the theory of the diaspora that I have recounted still holds – memory and history are all 'Out There', not 'In Here' – for aliens, memory is precisely what must be destroyed, as Jasmine does so effectively. Though not quite – if only diasporic experiences were as simple as that. Experience must be repressed and the self must undergo a massive, though artificial, transformation in adapting to the values of the 'normative' subject.

If Bharati Mukherjee distances herself from questions of coalitional possibilities and from a radical engagement with nature of the diasporic self (though it must be added that she never loses sight of these issues), in the works of Kureishi and Rushdie diasporic lives are not detached from the political agenda of the nation-state. What we get in their works is the construction of the despairing world of the migrant in the racist agenda of Thatcherite Britain. In Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985; Kureishi, 1992) the 'Paki' (a racist term for the South Asian diaspora in Britain) experience is linked to that of the British working class without losing sight of the fascist elements in precisely the working class itself as it constructs a class of Pakis beneath it. Under a sinister and prolonged form of racism in Britain that had taken its most virulent form in Enoch Powell's 'river of blood' speech and continued in various ways with the Tories equation of homophobic and migrant discourses, the diaspora retreated into its own essentialisms and began to live out its imaginary homeland in the mosques and video-circuits of Britain. With diasporas linked to ethnic definitions of the nation – Enoch Powell's argument that races had nations to which they belonged – diasporic creative imagination (in response to their ethnicised definitions by the nation-state began to celebrate the dynamic quality of diasporic lives in Britain. In both *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987; Kureishi, 1992) post-colonial hybridity is celebrated through the exposure of the diasporic repressed. By lifting the lid on the

diaspora's own homophobic rhetoric and by representing gay and lesbian diasporic selves, Kureishi shifts the debates to questions about the diasporic body as corporeal selves within the racial economy of a nation.

The great work of diasporic remembrance and self-critique is, of course, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. If *A House for Mr Biswas* established one kind of diasporic foundational narrative within the regime of the realist, Salman Rushdie has created another through the hyperreal modalities of the postmodern. In Naipaul the nostalgia for return remained strong as old men in the verandah of the Tulsi shop smoked their *cheelums* and *ganja* and reminisced about their homeland. In Rushdie Gibreel and Chamcha debate the differences between being joined to the past and hence being, to a degree, 'continuous' and being a 'willing re-invention', a creature of 'selected discontinuities'. (Rushdie, 1988: 427) What is celebrated is the challenge of the new and a rejection of earlier distinctions based on the purity of holding onto a memory. As Rushdie himself has written, '*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs'. (Rushdie, 1991: 394) But even as the movement of newness into the world is celebrated the text also generated a return to the old rhetoric of nativism, religious purity and racial difference. Instead of hybridity the Rushdie Affair in fact presented us with a radical instance of the different. (Mishra, 1995a) Without getting into the debates surrounding the affair what needs to be said in the context of diasporic theory is that any kind of threat (and the Muslim South Asian Diaspora did see the work as being unconsciously complicit with a Thatcherite presumption that always parodied the 'Pakis' in Britain) invariably raises the defences of ethnicity and racial exclusiveness. It is then that the new diaspora invariably picks up the categories of the old and begins to question, through its own new found conservatism, the very foundations of late modern hypermobile diasporas.

If I rush to my conclusion it is because demands on space do not give me too much room to manoeuvre. The foregoing skims the surface of a problematic that I have extensively debated elsewhere. In this summary, though, what I have tried to address are two very simple issues that may be linked to what Ien Ang has called the double consciousness of 'descent' and the politics of 'consent'. (Ang, 1994) In her astute argument, she draws attention to an endemic tendency in much of post-structuralist criticism to replicate the myths of nomadology whenever one speaks about diasporas without paying attention to quite specific differences between diasporas. For the fact is that diasporic articulation/disarticulation of difference is fundamentally a matter of the political ideology of the nation-state. The two issues that I have addressed, therefore, are: first, that any study of the Indian diaspora should look at two different archives as part of one's research; and, second, that though the new diaspora, in the age of late capital, is such a powerful critique of the ethnic origins of nation-states, it should be

remembered that the relic of the calls for nativism and purity – calls that have always been possible through the organizational skills of a diaspora's priestly caste – can be triggered whenever Sartre's ghostly question 'What do we do with them now?') surfaces. It is a pity that at precisely the moment when another foundational narrative had supplanted an earlier one, a new lamp for the old, the millenarian panic of the old diaspora returned to haunt the new. But then diasporic narrative has never been unproblematic and just when we think we have found a useful model with which to read it, a new twist in the narrative takes us back to a fundamental principle of generic taxonomy: diasporas, like genres, are always mixed.

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