

SYNTAX OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF SELECT CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE DIASPORA WRITINGS

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award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English)**

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. Kasturi Saikia, hereby declare that the subject matter of my dissertation entitled *SYNTAX OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF SELECT CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE DIASPORA WRITINGS* is the bonafide record of work done by me under the supervision of Prof. Nigamananda Das and that the content of the dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

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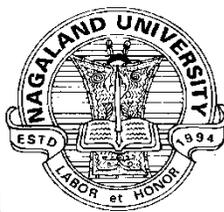
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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ***SYNTAX OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF SELECT CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE DIASPORA WRITINGS*** is the bonafide record of research work done by Ms. Kasturi Saikia, Regn no : 51/2020, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2019-2020. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title and that the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the scholar under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations May 2016 (amended) and the scholar has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for submission of the dissertation. Plagiarism test of the dissertation was conducted as per UGC Regulations 2018 and 1% of similarity was detected which is permissible as per rules.

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Preface

The term Diaspora evokes a sense of displacement and foregrounds a notion of home from where dispersion occurs. The mere utterance of the word invokes an image of a journey. These journeys are significant as they are quintessential journey into becoming someone. The idea of settling down somewhere underscores the notion of Diasporic journeys. Many of these journeys bear historical genesis like the mass exodus of Jews from their homeland. It is significant to ponder on the circumstances under which the journey was undertaken thus, untangling the socio-economic, political and historical conditions that mark the trajectories of these journeys. Slavery, indentured labours, conflicts or political strife, are a few among the many reasons that triggers the mass exodus of people. It is therefore crucial to delve deep into the processes involved during this displacement of people. The term “Diaspora” entails variegated notions, with cultural and political bearings, all of which would be impossible to cover in a short duration of study. However, crucial to this entire process of displacement is the individual who undertakes the journey. The “self”, therefore, is the thrust of the study. It is significant to note the manner in which the journey of the individuals conclude, from their departure till their arrival in the alien land. The understanding of the transformation of individuals in their journey from their native land to the host land entails the socio-historical and cultural circumstances. Therefore, the research begins with the presumption that the ‘self’ is modified by the prevailing situations as well as the prior experiences. Regarded as the totality of one’s beliefs and core of one’s existence, the self resists any fixed definitions. Considering this as the focal point of the study, the research aims at the understanding, analyzing and reconstructing the notion of the selves of people displaced from their homeland. The dissertation titled *Syntax of the Self: A Study of Select Chinese and Vietnamese Diaspora Writings* undertakes this ambitious project of analyzing the “Self”. Keeping in consideration the magnitude of the seemingly simple notion of “self” and the restricted time period, the study shall focus particularly on the formation of the self and the factors that underscores it.

In the simplest terms, “syntax” refers to the arrangement of words to form meaningful sentences. Thus, syntax, can be regarded as a meaningful unified whole which is composed of parts. Here, an analogy is drawn between the human self and a sentence. The human self, which

is in exile, too is composed of certain aspects and emotions which are organized in different patterns. They are defined by certain socio-historical and cultural conditions which cannot be overlooked. Time, memory and space turns out to be the prime factors in the constitution of the Diaspora selves. Thus, Diaspora selves are composite formations which demands in depth study. Further, the study shall ponder on the process through which collective identities are formed which can either be empowering or disempowering. The structure of the self is viewed as the object of analysis in the study. There might occur different understanding of one's self owing to the variegated cultural configurations of the individual being. The chosen field of study is quite relevant in this age of widespread migration and hopes to initiate significant discussions on the nature of "self" in the Diaspora predicament.

Abstract

The notion of Diaspora has always triggered questions regarding its nature and implications. Evoking a sense of displacement and dispersion, the notion of Diaspora, through the idea of "home" foregrounds a sense of longing and belonging. The idea of a journey underlies the creation of Diasporas across the world. This journey, apart from its physical bearings is also a continuous journey of 'becoming' someone. The individuals who embark on this journey whether voluntarily or involuntarily undergo ramifications which are crucial to the understanding of the place of origin as well as the hostland. Along with numerous historical reasons for dispersions, there are myriad of other reasons for which a journey is undertaken. The study, therefore, delves deep into these reasons, the process and the resultant changes. Resisting any homogenizing tendencies, the study has probed deeper into the formation of Diaspora selves with varied migration history. The study also raises crucial questions regarding the category of Asians, immigrants and refugees.

Chapter one is the introductory chapter which addresses all the basic notions related to the research. For the dissertation, Chinese and Vietnamese Diaspora narratives have been selected. Differing in space and time, these Diaspora narratives provide the scope for heterogeneity in Diasporic experiences and its implications. Therefore, the study begins with the discussion of the historical genesis of the migration of the countries selected. An understanding of the notion of Self is also provided based on both Eastern and Western traditions of thought. This notion of Self is analyzed in a Diaspora predicament with reference to the texts selected. For this purpose, the widely accepted predicaments of a Diaspora self is discussed in the chapter.

The second chapter titled "Dynamics of the Self" carries forward the discussions initiated in the first chapter. Through the works of the Chinese American writer Gish Jen, an attempt has been made to foreground the evolution of the self of the characters through the lens of postcolonial and postmodern concepts. All the writers trace the quintessential journey of 'becoming' marked by recreations and reimaginings. A number of processes are in work in this process of becoming. An attempt has been made to trace, analyse and interrogate the conditions that trigger the changes in the individual being. The self has been argued to be an unstable identity thus defying any possible metanarrative of a fixed and unchanging self. In this process, the theoretical framework of multiculturalism, racial and cultural boundaries have been questioned.

The third chapter titled "Migration, (Be)longing and Memory" discusses the evolution of Self through tragic and traumatic circumstances. It engages with crucial questions that migration

arouses and particularly deals with migration which has been thrust upon the people of South Vietnam. Selected Vietnam War narratives of Thanhha Lai and Le Thi Diem Thuy that bear the scars of the traumatic past have been the thrust of discussion in this chapter. Maurice Halbwach's notion of collective memory has been employed to comprehend the nature of their remembrance of the past. An effort has been made to probe deeper into the questions of displacement and significant questions regarding the remembrance, narration and the sharing of trauma have been raised. The chapter also addresses the Diasporic predicaments shaped by the past memories and also the dynamic nature of memory and its role in the formation of the Diaspora self. Cathy Caruth's and Alexander Jeffery's theoretical framework of trauma theory have been employed to analyze the Diaspora predicament shaped by the traumatic experiences of the past. The chapter also foregrounds the predicaments of refugees through the lens of the refugees themselves, thus intending to provide a novel perspective to analyze the category of refugees.

Chapter four titled "The Architecture of the Autobiographical Self" attempts to provide a much more intimate experience of the plight of the refugees through Le Ly Hayslip's war memoirs which are written with unflinching honesty and clarity. Employing Judith Herman's steps of recovery, an attempt has been made to critically analyse Hayslip's journey of healing. The chapter deals with the state of being a "victim" of war and its aftermath. An attempt has been made to comprehend the nature of Hayslip's Self amidst conflict and in a post conflict situation. Apart from presenting a critical perspective on the nature of memoirs, the chapter aims at delving deep into Hayslip's evolution, transformation of her Self and the predicament of an immigrant in a post conflict situation.

Chapter five titled "Anatomy of Difference" aims at delineating the differences in the formation of Selves which apparently seem to be the universal notion. This chapter attempts at foregrounding the polysemic nature of self through a comparative analysis of all the texts selected. In an attempt to foreground the variations in the formation of Selves, this chapter provides a comparative analysis between the narrative style of the texts selected, the themes and the history as well as the orientation of the writers towards the process of formation of Diaspora selves.

The concluding chapter foregrounds a comprehensive understanding of all the chapters and brings forth the possibilities of alternative avenues of research in the field of the formation of Diaspora Selves.

Chapter I

Introduction

Bestowed with the power of reason, human beings, of all the creatures of the world are blessed with the ability of reflecting upon their thoughts, feelings and actions. This notion of self reflectivity, which is quintessential to philosophy, can also be expressed as subjectivity. The understanding of self has been crucial to the comprehension of human consciousness. Discourses on self are quite a commonplace activity and is considered as a widely used term to express a range of concepts including agency, person hood, subjectivity and consciousness. This study on Self created for itself a significant niche in the field of neurology, psychology, sociology as well as spiritual studies. Self and identity are central to the analysis of group and intergroup process and relationships. The multiple functions of 'Self' as a noun, pronoun, adjective and verb connote a varying range of notions. In the simplest terms, the self is personal and is the totality of one's beliefs, practices and perceptions. It embody thoughts, sensations and emotions that constitute the individuality of a person and also upholds abstract connotations. It is worth mentioning that the notion of self and its constitution is comprehended in diverse ways by many religions as well as disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Generally, perceived to be a subjective experience, the demands of the external milieu too play a crucial role is moulding one's notion of self.

The 'Self' is neither entirely intrinsic nor extrinsic to individuals and rejects any simplistic opposition between an individual's inner and outer worlds. The Self can be argued to be in a constant flux and in a process of creation and recreation. From the perspective of immigrants, the formation of their Diaspora self is a continuous process of discovering and understanding rather than defining it in strict and limited terms.

The idea of self has its influential supporters and ardent opponents throughout the history of both Western and Indian thought. Endless controversies over the existence, nature and value of self have been recorded in the Indian as well as Western traditions, thus, engaging the best minds of Western and Eastern intellectual tradition of thought. The notion of self is crucial to the Eastern and Western philosophical tradition and is the core of many philosophical discourses and debates. The West defines the notion of self to be an individual perception by foregrounding the differences from others. However, in the Eastern context, the self is situated in the community and is understood in relation to others.

Within the Eastern conceptions of self, there exist contradictory notions. The concept of “Brahman” and “Atman” are crucial to Hindu philosophy. The Vedic Sanskrit word, “Brahman” refers to the ‘universe’, the ultimate reality. It is a key concept found in the Vedas and is also central to the Upanishads. It is related to the concept of “Atman”. It is a Sanskrit word that refers to the inner soul or self. The six schools of Hindu philosophy give credence to the presence of a soul in every being. The earliest usage of the word can be witnessed in the Rig Veda. Crucial to the Upanishads, Atman refers to the deepest level of one’s existence. In contrast to the Hindu philosophy, the Buddhist sutras deny the presence of Atman or soul. Buddha attacked the claims to a fixed self. The overarching purpose of their teaching is the liberation of the self from matter. The experience of higher states of consciousness is especially important in understanding the essence of self in many systems of Asian thought. In the East, the idea of the Self is comprehended in terms of a complete unity with the creator. However, in the West the idea of the Self is perceived as distinct from God. The perception of a higher state of consciousness is indispensable in understanding the essence of self in many systems of Asian thought. For example, the acquisition of higher states of consciousness is of great significance in Yoga and Vedanta, as well as in most Buddhist schools of thought in India and elsewhere in Asia.

Adhering to Plato’s notions, Aristotle defined self as the core of all living beings. David Hume, conceptualized self as a constant state of flux, constituted of constantly changing elements. The fields of philosophy, neurology, psychology, sociology and spiritual studies dwell on different aspects of the Self. Psychological studies of Self hood have significant forerunners including James, Cooley, Mead, and Freud whose works have inspired the psychological studies of selfhood.

In the Western tradition, individuality is generally the core to defining self identity. However the collective sense of the formation of self cannot be ignored. The significant axiom of understanding human self and existence in the West has been “I think, therefore I exist”. From Descartes to Kant and Husserl, the existence of individual has been the subject of Western philosophy. Descartes proposition of “Cogito ergo sum”, questioning the existence of one’s mind leads us to the reality of the existence of the individual mind, the self. The individual entity, gaining the power of cognition or rationality, enjoys superiority, thus creating a hierarchy in the order of things.

All notion of self foregrounds a sense of unity and coherence. Ideas on self existed from the beginning irrespective of any psychological and philosophical perspectives. Some were unexamined cultural assumptions that were passed down the ages. A historical continuity in the understanding of self could be traced. Richard Ashmore and Lee Jussim in the book *Self and Identity* mention about the notion of “empiricist self” propounded by John Locke (Ashmore and Jussim, *Self and Identity* 140). According to Locke, the self exists as a phenomenon which can be observed in the manner in which the external world is examined. Meditations on the self through self reflective activities establish the self as an observer. Locke treats the self as an observable natural phenomenon and consciousness of this self occupies all other experiences of the individual. This notion of self propounded by Locke in eighteenth century, in a way, replaced the older notions of self, thus, paving the path for a novel understanding of the self. Over the years, this conceptualization of self by the empiricist as an entity that can be observed/ analyzed was extended to the self itself. The self, then, is conceptualized as a source of authority that evaluates, observes, analyzes and controls its self. Eventually, towards the nineteenth century, the self is perceived as an entity which can be observed and analyzed. Slowly began the numerous assumptions that there can be multiple social selves owing to the contexts. Different fields of knowledge, in an effort to understand the nature of self, delved deeper into the notion. It brings forth different perspectives in which an individual’s entity or the self can be comprehended. This notion of self as an individual entity had a significant influence on the literature of the Western world as well as other fields of research including psychology. Prominent names including George Herbert Mead, William James, and Charles Cooley figured in the discussions on Self.

In Western psychology, William James’s writings on the Self in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) added to the field of research on Self. He differentiated between the Self as a knower, or the I, and the Self as known, or Me. According to him, the ‘Me’ is one of the many things that the ‘I’ may be conscious of and the spiritual, social and the corporeal self, the social are varied aspects of the self. It is worth mentioning that, since European Enlightenment, the cognitive, affective and conative domain has been the fundamental framework for the development of modern psychology. James’s notion of Self is rooted in the socio-psychological tradition where the material self, social self and spiritual self are crucial to the formation of empirical self. James further foregrounds the presence of multiple social selves which defines an individual.

The American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, George Herbert Mead in his book, *Self, Language and the World* (1973) emphasizes that social behavior which involves communication leads to the formation of Self. Out of the social process, emerges the Self. In addition to it, Self, according to Mead is to be aware of one's behavior. He states that Self arises out of social factors and is not initially present at birth. Self gradually develops in the individual because of the web of relations and the processes of social activities. In sociology, along with Mead, Cooley also made major contributions to understanding Self. They recognized the significant role of the social factors in the development of self conception and personhood.

The notion of Self is also crucial to feminist philosophies and is crucial to understand the inherent symbolic notion of patriarchy. Women's relation with their bodies and their perceptions of their Self is claimed to have been manipulated by the complex social structures. The feminists in the later part of twentieth century argued that the body plays an instrumental role in the structuring of our self and subjectivities. The idea of the body being central to the formation of understanding of one's self and perceptions is crucial to feminist philosophy. Beauvoir interpreted subjectivity in a social matrix as the representation of the human body, and therefore, her theory is geared towards the complexities of interpersonal relationships. The other French feminists including Lucy Irigaray and Helene Cixous brings forth variegated forms of claiming one's self. Helene Cixous propounded the concept of *écriture féminine* which foregrounds the significance of women's writing for the psychic understanding of selves. Women, have been violently driven away from their bodies and have been denied expressions which hinders their process of formation of their perceptions of their self. Therefore, the idea of the 'self' cannot be easily replaced by that of the 'person' or the 'subject' because multiple selves usually constitute a person or subject, each of which ties him or her to various socio-cultural contexts or collectives. The variegated fields of research on Self foregrounds different perspectives, thereby, challenging a universal definition of Self.

These discussions on Self occupies a pivotal position in Diasporic literature which forms an integral part of the rich oeuvre of Postcolonial literature. The evolution and the complex formation of self in a foreign land have raised a spirit of inquiry among the scholars. This study of the formation of the self in the host land foregrounds complicated processes of assimilation and raises deeper questions regarding race, ethnicity and personhood.

Diaspora studies have been concerned with the mobility of people and the process of transformation of a person from being an exile to an immigrant through evolving conceptions of

personhood, agency and Self . Before delving deep into the significance of self in Diaspora studies, it is crucial to gain a proper insight into the bearings of the term “Diaspora”.

The noun 'Diaspora' has its origins in the Greek language which refers to dispersion of seeds during the sowing process. This initial understanding of dispersal has changed and today it relates to dispersal of people. The early occurrence of the word Diaspora is found in the *Old Testament* where God dispersed all the disobedient people to the earth. Here, the idea of Diaspora is closely connected to the notion of ‘exile’. This connection between exile and Diaspora is also felt in the history of the Jewish community which was banished in the 6th century B.C.E. Jews regarded their dispersal as a form of divinely imposed exile.

According to Robin Cohen, the notion of Diaspora entails a distinct perspective or viewpoint on the world of migration. The concept of Diaspora cannot be rigidly defined and must be understood as an idea that enables us to understand the world of migration. Diaspora, as a concept, he states, “produces powerful insights into that world, but it can also produce some powerful distortions, depending on how the term is used and for what purpose” (Cohen, *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* 1).

The notion of Diaspora foregrounds distinct aspects of migration and the world that migration creates. Defining it in rigid terms run the risk of undermining its multifaceted nature through homogenizing the diverse reasons behind the creation of the Diaspora.

Diaspora can be regarded as a form of dispersion. Dispersion seems to be a more inclusive and generalized connotation which includes migration for varied reasons, including education, job, new citizenship, etc. It is noteworthy that, the Diasporas cannot be homogenized. The historical background, the origin, ideologies, culture all constitute the differences. They also act as the factors for their various degrees of integration into their host lands. Difference in the purpose of migration is observed between the first generation and second generation migrants. Indentured labour, which characterized the first generation of migration provides cheap work force to the colonial plantation economies. Further, towards the nineteenth century, cheap labour force, especially from South India was brought into the British colonies. Characterized by indentured labour, trade motives and war massacres, the first generation diasporas often hold memories of compulsion, exile and trauma. The second generation of immigrants, on the other hand, migrated to the host country in search for better opportunities. The second wave of South Asians who travelled across countries were skilled professionals and therefore, their movement is particularly characterized by willingness and the desire to climb the social ladder.

Since the second generation inherits the image of the homeland from their parents or through books, they cannot reconstruct the memories of their homeland with the same intensity and nostalgia as their parents. The second wave of migration which came about in the middle of twentieth century saw a change in the migration pattern. The second and third generations of migrants tend to share cultural commonalities in food, movies, music, dress with their host country. Some choose mobility, others have it thrust upon them. Some eventually return home and many assimilate into the culture of the host country.

All these historical associations shape the present understanding of Diaspora. Through movement, connectivity and return, the idea of Diaspora sheds light on the world that migration creates. The stages of a Diaspora life are characterized by exile, nostalgia and homesickness and a desire to return to the homeland. The notion of Diaspora entails, in one form or the other an idea of return to a homeland. The Diaspora narratives across the world are characterized by some shared predicaments. Hybridity, loss, nostalgia, a desire to return to the homeland shapes the Diaspora narrative. The concept of home in Diaspora studies interrogates the notions of identity and belonging. It is intricate, complex and has multifaceted meaning which signifies the plurality of belonging. Caught in the tussle between the homeland and the host land, the Diaspora predicament resists any fixity of meaning of the idea of home which can be multiple and constructed. Home for them is the mythic space. The physicality of the homeland is engraved in the collective memory of the Diaspora subjects. The Diaspora subject experiences nostalgia and with it comes a desire to return to the homeland. Nostalgia and homesickness characterizes the Diaspora predicament which is more deeply felt in the case of first generation Diaspora. The diaspora dilemma is characterized by a sense of alienation. The feeling of alienation germinates from the sense of unwantedness felt by the diasporic subject in the host land because of the inability to accept the culture of the host land. Moreover, tensions of identity occur in the mind of Diaspora subject which runs the risk of essentialisation. At times, the identity construction of the diaspora subject comes at the cost of the pain and the loss that the migrants feel. The identity of these dispersed groups of people, are culturally and at times politically shaped by the socio-cultural and political factors.

Given the predicament of the Diaspora subject, it is generally assumed that the Diasporic literature is informed by pangs and pains of exile and a sense of nostalgia. In "Writing in Diaspora," Zuzzana Olszewsk stated that the *Hebrew Bible* preserves one of the earliest known examples of diasporic literature in Psalm 137, which was emblematic of the sense of loss, and nostalgia.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and

wept at the memory of Zion. . .

How could we sing a song of Yahweh on alien soil?

If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand wither!

May my tongue remain stuck to my palate if I do not keep you in mind,

if I do not count Jerusalem the greatest of my joys.

(Psalm 137)

According to the theological tradition, Babylon epitomizes exile and isolation in the religious tradition, not only in Jewish culture, for other communities who have adopted the concept of Diaspora.

From the mid 1960s, the term, Diaspora became more popular and was employed to display identities bonded by common heritage, ancestry, civilization, language, ethnicity and race. Acquiring different connotations down the ages, Diaspora is not a static concept that can be strictly defined but instead, is a mechanism that is rooted in the social world. It evolves, changes and is being continually contested.

The common understanding of self and personhood as an individual phenomena cannot be regarded as the core to understanding the formation of self. The early Jewish and Armenian exile foregrounds the retention of a collective memory and an idealized notion of an ancestral home. A sense of solidarity exists in the collective experience of exile and trauma. Even in the modern world, this shared collective memory of trauma and exile plays an instrumental role in the development of a Diaspora self. When interpreted through the theoretical lens of “social selves” formulated by William James, it can be said that the Diaspora self is the result of a continuity of memory through time (James, *The Principles of Psychology* 184). Migration which is characterized by war and other violent events lead to a forced exile. The people who were forced to migrate across seas as refugees or bonded labourers often hold fast to the collective memory about their original homeland and also holds a sense of alienation and the fear of not being accepted by the host country completely. The migrants, particularly the first generation migrants tend to idealize

their ancestral homeland and display a strong sense of nostalgia and homesickness. The children of the survivors of wars and massacres, however experience the violence and their ancestral homeland through their progenitors. For these second and third generation migrants, their homeland exists in the stories of their elders and ancestors, and thus there occurs a difference in their perception of their homeland and also the hostland.

Given this situation, it is noteworthy that, the effort of arriving at a single definition of the Diaspora self might result in inconsistencies and overlooking of many crucial aspects of the life of a Diaspora subject. Focus on the double consciousness, hybridity, fragmentations in the Diaspora world leads to the understanding of the new forms of identity and culture constituted. Beyond the borders of the homeland and hostland, the Diaspora paves the path for new cultural spaces. The concept of transnationalism is often employed to comprehend Diasporic relations which cuts across territorial boundaries. A Diaspora community display strong connections with the homeland and resistance to any efforts of cultural erasure. Apart from its apparent physicality, Diaspora can be described as a social condition whose effects are both tangible and intangible.

The mechanism of identity formation of the people of the Diaspora involves crucial processes. Transculturation, acculturation, enculturation, deculturation and contra – acculturation are some of the significant ones. Marked by the influx of new cultural elements, transculturation and acculturation involves melding of cultures. Transculturation is characterized by traces of resistance to the cultural indoctrination of the host country and on the other hand, acculturation can be regarded as a process of assimilation, where the immigrants acquire and adapt the culture of the host country. Enculturation, on the other hand is not associated with the meddling of different cultures. Instead, it is a process by which, an individual can learn and adopt his/her own culture. Through positive reinforcement, an individual adopts the behavior and pattern of the particular culture that he /she lives in. A prolonged contact with a foreign culture and learning the ways of the host culture might together lead to the loss of some of the cultural elements of the immigrants. This process of loss of some cultural elements is known as deculturation. In other words, acculturation might lead to deculturation and it might not necessarily be negative. Contra –acculturation is a postcolonial phenomenon which speaks for an amalgamation of culture in the process of which the immigrants are not able to cast of the inherent cultural legacy of their ancestors and also fail to embrace the host culture. Therefore, in an attempt to syncretize the two, they experience contra-acculturation.

Further, the postcolonial notion of 'in-between' spaces and hybridity also must be taken into consideration. Bhabha's concept of 'in-between' spaces identifies sites of collaboration and identity contestation in defining the identity of the migrant (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 1). His concept of hybridity and third space is crucial to the understanding the position of a migrant in the postcolonial context. All the processes discussed above are resultant of a prolonged contact with a foreign culture and are crucial to the understanding of 'Diaspora'.

It is also noteworthy that, in the discussions of self, the binary of self/other comes into play. At times, an exclusionary politics underscores this self/other relation. The self and the other occupying positions of centre/margin underlie complex relations of race and gender. Self/other binary also at times creates alternative paradigms of comprehension which gained more prominence with the rise of postmodernity and postcolonialism.

The formation of a Diaspora community involves immigration of people; a global phenomena and an inevitable trend since the beginning of human history. This ushers in significant changes including changes in the sociocultural, political and personal aspect of our lives. The phenomenon of immigration has bonded people through a thread of shared experiences. Both on an individual and a community level, the immigrants go through some shared predicaments. However, the predicaments are characterized by the sociocultural environment as well as the past history of migration. Given their uniqueness and differences, the experiences of immigrants must be carefully analyzed. Immigration has been a central characteristic of the American society and has given rise to multiple layers of discrimination against and prejudice toward different races and ethnicities. Diasporas can integrate into their host lands and at the same time maintain close relations with their homeland.

Owing to the large scale migration of the recent decades, America has been generally perceived as the 'melting pot' and 'salad bowl'. However, the metaphors of 'salad bowl', 'melting pot' demands critical insight. The first Asian immigrants in large numbers to the United States were the Chinese who were recruited for the sugar industry in Hawaii in the 1830s and the building of the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s. The Southeast Asians, including those from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, mainly arrived as refugees because of the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese American Diasporas and the Chinese American Diasporas are two significant Diasporas that carved for itself a significant niche in the literary world. Sharing a common history of war, both the countries witnessed migration in significant numbers after the first World War. In 1850s, because of the gold rush in California, immigrants in huge numbers from Asia arrived in United States.

This included immigrants from China who worked as cheap labourers to work in mining and agricultural industries. Further, the end of the Vietnam War paved the path for the influx of immigrants and refugees in United States, thus marking the Asian Americans as the rapidly growing minority group in the United States.

It is noteworthy that, the Vietnam War lies at the heart of the initial migration of people from Vietnam. The Vietnam War also known as the American War, led to the displacement of half of the population of Vietnam to "host countries" such as the United States , France, Canada , Australia, or Germany. Also known as second Indochina war, the Vietnam War lasted for nineteen years, beginning from 1955 to 1975 and was fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The perception of communism as a threatening force by America is at the heart of the Vietnam War. North Vietnam was supported by the communist countries and South Vietnam was supported by the anticommunist countries including United States. The liberation of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, also known as "Fall of Saigon" marks the closure of the Gruesome Vietnam War in 1975. However, the aftermath of the fall of Saigon is pathetic. Thousands of refugees fled Vietnam by boat in order to escape the cruelties. These people were known as "boat people" (Angular and Juan, *Little Saigons*, 20). However, many of them met their death during this because of overcrowded boats and natural calamities. Even after forty years of the fall of Saigon on 1975, the Vietnam War still remains the subject of continued reflection, research and analysis, with historians providing conflicting interpretations about the policies, motivations and actions of participants as well as the rights and wrongs of the war. Thus, because of the war, poverty, promises of a better life, and also political shifts, Vietnam has undergone many phases of "mass emigration". These gruesome Vietnam War narratives only occupy a small, though significant portion of Vietnamese Diaspora narratives. This exile of the war refugees, however, cannot be regarded as the only undifferentiated category which characterizes Vietnam diaspora. When observed keenly, the reasons of departure are too complex for homogenizing. The political eras of their migration should also be taken into consideration. Narratives of the Vietnamese Diasporic community are largely marked by memories and experiences of war time and post-war refugees. Diasporic Vietnamese narratives entail the lesser known stories, memories, and experiences of the Vietnamese Diaspora. The migration of Vietnamese people in the later part of the century exhibit varied reasons for the departure from their homelands including the fulfillment of dreams in the Promised Land. This Vietnamese American Diaspora according to Robin Cohen classifies the broad categories of victim, labour, trade and business diasporas. He further mentions that the victim diaspora is the long established form of diaspora which is related to the dispersion of people as the aftermath of a traumatic event. In his words, victim diaspora

share “a trauma affecting a group collectively...events characterized by their brutality, scale and intensity so as unambiguously to compel emigration or flight” (Cohen, *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* 2). This traumatic dispersal of people as refugees especially after the Vietnam War are bonded by shared feelings of trauma and nostalgia. Their collective memory is characterized by tales of violence and fear.

Similar to Vietnam, many Chinese workers immigrated to the States to escape from the tyranny caused by the Chinese war lords. One of the largest Diaspora, the Chinese migration to U.S was initially triggered by various jobs including working in agricultural factories, gold mines and constructing railways. The increase of Chinese workers in U.S led to the creation of anti-Chinese feeling, thus regarding them as the yellow peril. However, later on, Chinese people have voluntarily migrated to U.S. in the hope for a better future.

Given these histories of migration, there emerged many writers whose writing speaks of the migration and the struggle of the people in all its essence. With the rise of ethnic writers, the body of Asian American literature expands. Speaking about the East and the West, the ancient and the modern, this body of literature is receiving much critical acclaim. Given the experiences of the two worlds, the Asian American writers wrote on the two worlds, the dual loyalties and the immigrant experiences. However, it is significant to draw our attention towards the emergence of the term “Asian American”. As mentioned in *Encyclopedia for Asian American Literature* by Seiwoong Oh, the category of “Asian American” did not exist before 1960s. This category was not known until America began to categorize the Asian ethnic groups into a general and broad category called Asian Americans in the late 1960s. The term Asian American literature first came into being when the establishment of an Asian American cultural tradition was part of the larger political struggle to gain visibility and advance social justice. This also reflects the tendency of homogenization of the Western scholarship which overlooks the diversity of the ethnicities, languages and historical background. The identity of an Asian American seem to be enforced on them, thus subjecting the immigrants to exclusionary and restrictive naturalization laws which promoted ghettoization in diverse forms. This in a way hints at the underlying racist tendency in the ‘multicultural America’. Only after their arrival in America, the migrants and refugees encounter challenges of homogenization and inclusionist tendencies. Many Asian American writers including Gish Jen challenges this tendency of ghettoization through their writings.

The term also upholds political connotations. There are writers like Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin who foregrounds the claim of an American identity, rather than an Asian one. There are writers who also try to bridge the gap between the two worlds.

Nevertheless, Asian American literature stands as a testimony to the troubled history of the Asian Americans raising deeper questions of becoming an American, ethnicity and racial minorities. Asian American literature can be said to be addressing some shared themes of Americanization, racism, intergenerational conflict, homeland and the host land. The first known Asian American work was written by the Chinese American Lee Yan Phou, whose memoir *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) attempted to present the rich and intricate Chinese culture, customs, and tradition. Later with the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1976, Asian American literature grew prominent. The Chinese American literature and the Vietnamese American literature, selected for the study, have gradually evolved over the years depending on the contributions which strengthened the foundation of the literary body. The ethnic heritage of the writers as well as the genres of the writings plays a significant role in analyzing this body of Diaspora literature. The authors selected for the research share a commonality based on a shared heritage of trauma, loss and exile. The list of works selected for the research is symptomatic of the most traumatic and forced migration as well as voluntary assimilation to the host land.

The literary outpourings of the age speak for the struggle of the Vietnamese Americans to be at home in the two countries. It is noteworthy that, memory is crucial to issues related to Vietnam War. The narratives are characterized by post memory and trauma which hints at the efforts of the refugees to assimilate into the foreign culture and at the same time upholding their cultural heritage. The earliest Vietnamese American writers are memoirists describing their experience of the war. After Quang Nhuong Huynh published *The Land I Lost* (1982), the first Vietnamese American book, a series of Vietnamese American memoirs followed, including Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh's *South Wind Changing*, Quang X. Pham's *The war* had a ripple effect that spread outwards from Vietnam to other countries and continents. These works replicate the plight of the War survivors as well as appeals to the postwar generations. These narratives bring home the brutalities of the war as well as the post-war trauma. The meaning of surviving war is a central theme in these narratives.

It brings back both the bitter and sweet memories of their homeland. Their Diaspora predicament is further jeopardized at their state of being a refugee. As Viet Thanh Nguyen said, “It would be so much easier to call myself an immigrant, to pass myself off as belonging to a category of migratory humanity that is less controversial, less demanding, and less threatening than the refugee” (Nguyen, *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* 3). Born in Phan Thiet, Vietnam, Le and her father fled their country by boat in 1978, leaving her mother behind. She documents her personal narrative in *The Gangster We are all Looking For* using the water motif to signify exile and loss. This fragmented, lyrical text explores the life of its protagonist along with that of her father and mother as they try to rebuild their family in a distant and foreign land. Although the imagery of water was typically used by Thuy to create division and describe loss, it also has the ability to unify and bring hope.

The other significant author, Hayslip, belongs to the first generation of Vietnamese American writers. Born into a peasant family in a small village she is unique among the writers for being the only one to have fought for the National Liberation Front (NLF), known as the Viet Cong. Hayslip’s first book, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, was co-written with Jay Wurts which depicts the traumatic stories of her youth and young adulthood in South Vietnam with a narrative about her eventual return to a reunified Vietnam in 1986. The narrative serves as an ethnography of Vietnamese rural culture and customs and as a history of the upheavals experienced by the Vietnamese people, caused by decades of warfare. Its sequel *Child of War, Woman of Peace* speaks of the years between Hayslip’s arrival in the United States in 1970 and her return to Vietnam in 1986.

The first generation of Chinese American writers, who were Western educated men, succeeded to a certain degree in assimilating into the mainstream American culture as well as the literary and intellectual milieu. They adopted the genre of autobiography which was alien to the Chinese literary tradition before twentieth century. Autobiographies allowed them the liberty of self expression as well as a platform for challenging the stereotypical notions against the Chinese. Literary historians believed Sui Sin Far, who adopted the English name, Edith Maude Eaton, to be the early Chinese memoirist. The Chinese American writers, in their writings foregrounded the Chinese civilization, culture and ideals.

The second generation Chinese American writers exhibited the tendency of assimilation more than the first generation writers. Most of these writers, who were American born, experienced their native land through their ancestors. They were more drawn towards the American culture and thus, their writings explored common themes like generational and cultural conflicts, alienation from the Chinese community, and eagerness to assimilate into the mainstream America.

Gish Jen is a second generation Chinese American writer and is another significant author selected for the study. In her entrancing literary works, Jen's exploration of the issue of identity, race and belonging in a multiethnic America appeals to both the parties. Jen's acclaimed debut novel *Typical American* recounts the life of three Chinese American characters in their identity pursuit and in their reconstruction of home and space in the United States from the late 1930s to the 1960s.

The Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, initially considered America as a far way foreign land which later, after migration, for some turns to a place to be explored and admired. Trapped in a troubled and ambiguous situation, the formation of Diaspora self turns to a complicated project. The first generation of migrants exhibits a strong tendency of upholding their traditional culture and ideals. The degree of affiliation to the culture of the homeland is lessened in the case of the second and third generation immigrants. For some, migration turns to a journey from despair to hope, from rags to riches and for others it turns to a journey of nostalgia and homesickness. However, it is noteworthy that, the immigrants in varying degree of intensity undergo racial categorization. Their adjustment to the host land shall be affected by their attitude towards the natives of the host country and vice versa. Depending on their individual abilities, they learn, adopt, change, and adjust. Longing for their American dreams, almost all immigrants have to struggle with racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of racism. The Diaspora subjects frequently question their formation of self. If linked to a process of racial formation, a marginalized sense of self develops. This however will vary according to the context and individual predispositions.

The novels selected for the study address different migration history. Contradictory reasons including brutality of war as well as hope of better possibilities in the Promised Land underscores the vast mobility of people. The texts selected for the study also address

these diverse reasons. Given this difference in the rationale behind migration, different theoretical paradigms will be adopted to analyze and interpret the formation of the Diaspora Self. This shall include post modern and post colonial critical concepts along with trauma theories. The study shall interrogate the notions of home, rootedness, belonging and longing, the aspects and the formation of a Diaspora self in the works of the above discussed authors. The authors selected are bonded through a shared history of trauma and exile as well as through their dreams for a better promised future. The immigrants have to undergo the inevitable struggle to resist, adapt and acculturate into the culture of the host country. As they attend to different contexts, the immigrants are involved in the crucial process of self-making. Separated through time and space, the authors selected shares a common cultural and ethnic heritage which shall further pave the path for a comparative study. Apart from being a physical and social condition, Diaspora can also be a spiritual condition where the migrants face deeper questions regarding their personhood and identity. The Diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves ultimately making way for shifting meanings of Diaspora. The western notion of continuity of the self through time, shaped through the social processes, which is crucial to Diasporic imagination shall be the thrust for the research. The writers selected for the study offer different stories of narration about their Diaspora lives in different contexts. This shall provide the scope for the comprehension of contextual variations of the Self. The novels selected for the study reflects various aspects of the Diaspora life, thereby paving the path for a variegated understanding of the Diaspora Selves. Change is constant to their formation of Diaspora selves and this process of change is dynamic. The study shall address both the process and the outcomes of the change for a proper comprehension of the formation of Diaspora selves.

Chapter II

Dynamics of the Self

The second chapter shall focus particularly on two novels by the Chinese American author Gish Jen: *Typical American* (2008) and *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997). An attempt will be made not only to elucidate the Diasporic predicaments but also to trace the development of the individual self of the characters through the critical lens of postmodern and postcolonial concepts.

The chapter titled “Dynamics of the Self”, shall trace, interpret and interrogate the forces and conditions which trigger the growth, change and development within the Diasporic subject. The process is usually a continuous one which entails the challenging of the normative ideas of a Diaspora self as well as succumbing to the ever changing forces of the new sociocultural environment. While doing so, analyzing the context within which the self is situated is inescapable. When cultures meet, colliding forces arise which constrain as well as regulate one’s understanding of self. The self/other polarity is challenged, thereby foregrounding the possibilities of the formations of multiple, and unstable hybrid selves. The self assumes multiple forms from being fragmentary to hybridized, from marginalized to occupying the interstitial space. Thus, the self shall be argued to be an unstable identity thus defying the metanarrative of a fixed and unchanging self. Central to the notion of Diaspora are narratives of the past and imaginations which together helps in binding in bits and pieces the memories of the past. In the chapter, an attempt has been made to foreground alternative understandings of the Diaspora self, thus moving beyond the universally accepted Diaspora predicaments of nostalgia and homesickness. Further, the difference between the approach of the first generation and second generation immigrants towards their assimilation into the culture of the host country shall be interpreted. Rather than a monolithic formation, the Diaspora self is argued to be a patchwork. In the chapter, Multiculturalism, as a framework for understanding the convergence of varied cultures is being questioned.

Theorists including Mead and Goffman foreground an individual’s adoption of multiple roles as well as performances as a significant mode of negotiating meaning, status and position in everyday life. These performances are crucial to the contextual understanding of one’s self. Social identities are at times, associated with an individual’s response to the situational demands which monitors the change in the performance in identities.

The selves at times entail the changing demands of the social world thereby foregrounding a complicated nature of self. Gish Jen in her works, foregrounds Mead and Goffman's multiple roles of an individual through her characters. She presents a complex social world, where no single religion or faith gains prominence. Rather, all the cultures mingle in an effort to exist peacefully.

Born as Lillian Jen in New York to Shanghai immigrants, Gish Jen changed her name early in her writing career to mark the creation of a new self. Her writings are well known for transcending the boundaries of the conventional ideas about cultural assimilation and conflict.

Her efforts to be known as an American writer shape her writings which are beyond the presumed and accepted experiences of Asian Americans. Jen, in an interview with Bill Moyers, described her multicultural writing style as an effort to capture the different groups jostling, contradicting and complementing each other. Jen is particularly against the ghettoisation of Asian American writers and refrained from exoticizing her writings. Not restricting her works to Asian American experiences, her works entail a wide range of themes thus foregrounding the diverse nature of her works.

Her novels, *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land* stand as a testimony of her unexotic and diverse creations. The novels which are in a sequence can be seen as a bildungsroman that traces the growth and development of the protagonist, Ralph Chang, a first generation Chinese American immigrant. The title *Typical American*, itself is ironic as it foregrounds the nature of the characters who, from initially despising everything that is typically American ends up being typically American themselves. The novel weaves the story of three Chinese immigrants, Ralph, Theresa and Helen struggling to assimilate in the New World.

Their journey of creating an identity for themselves unveils the vast plethora of pros and cons of assimilation. Jen portrays aptly their disillusionment with the Great American Dream. Ralph came to the United States as a student of electrical engineering with financial support from his family. Yet, gradually he has lost contact with his family in war-torn China because of the Japanese invasion and then the civil war. The novel foregrounds the negotiation of a new space by the Chang family in their process of becoming "Chang-kees" (Jen, *Typical American* 127). Both the novels depict variegated Chinese American immigrant experience. Presenting cultures in collision and confusion, the novels focus on the conglomeration of 'others' leading to a dynamic formation of Diaspora identity. The sequel, *Mona in the Promised Land*, in 1996, further explores the multiethnic reality of the United States. Set in a period from the late 1960s to the 1970s, the

young protagonist, Mona Chang's journey in the New World is explored.

Typical American unfolds with the self proclamation that "It's an American story" (Jen 3). Jen through this, foregrounds that the story extends beyond the typical Asian American experiences, which otherwise, is bestowed as a social and moral responsibility on the Asian immigrant writer. This beginning of the novel introduces the readers to the vast array of themes that the novel engages with. The story begins in China, when Yifeng Chang, who later changed his name to Ralph Chang, was of six years and had the least idea about the existence of America. America, for Ralph's parents epitomizes denigration, stupidity and corruption. Despite his parent's strong disapproval, Yifeng, arrives in New York in 1947 to study engineering leaving behind his father, his worried mother and his dutiful elder sister in a small town near Shanghai. After his arrival, Yifeng adapts an English name: Ralph, with a hope of smoothening his process of assimilation to the New World.

Ralph saw America as a paragon of liberty, hope and relief. In the beginning chapter, Jen aptly describes the excitement and awe of Ralph on reaching New York. She writes, "Those pilings! He wondered at the roller coasters, Ferris wheel. At cafeterias – eating factories, these seemed to him most advanced and efficient" (Jen 8). Reaching New York, Ralph's efforts in adjusting to the new land is evident in his mannerisms. Ralph always carries a Panama hat in order to portray a gentle man's look. The Panama hat, which has its origin in Ecuador, a country in South America, is one of the many tropes which Ralph employs to look like a proper American. Ralph's continuous efforts at making himself acceptable to the American society can be seen through his efforts of improving his English. However, in his efforts to assimilate into the new culture, Ralph felt his ties with his home country to be fading, as if "like a picture hung too long in a barbershop" (Jen 23). Straddling between two cultures, memories of his homeland overpowers him at times. However, his journey into the New world is not an easy one. Ralph falls awkwardly in love with a girl called Cammy and forgets to renew his visa. Along with his fear of being sent back to China by the immigration officials, where the Communists have come into power and his family has disappeared, he sets himself off underground and struggles for survival. With his Visa creating problems, Ralph started working in a basement section of a restaurant where he would pluck and clean chicken for hours. Jen, in a way, employed Ralph's American friend Pinkus as a mouthpiece through which she expresses the stereotypical notions of the American on China. Pinkus claims that in China everything happens through the backdoor unlike America. According to him, unlike China where people can sneak around, America is a country where morals are valued.

During his crisis, Theresa, his sister turns up and sets him back on the track. With the support of Theresa, he achieves his degree in engineering, marries Theresa's best friend, Helen, and gets two tenures of professorship. Eventually, the couple was blessed with two little girls Callie and Mona and Theresa, moves to suburban America to manage their daily humdrum in accordance with their source of income.

However, initially Ralph admits missing his home and "having a place that was home" (Jen 53). At moments like this, Ralph intensely feels his dislocation and ruminates over the thought of home. Helen, by marrying Ralph, felt, the need to make herself feel at home in her exile. Thus, the process of being at home, a space where one is comfortable with a sense of belongingness, seems to be a conscious effort on the part of Helen. The creation of her immigrant identity demands a conscious process of self making which is malleable and changes according to the demand of the environment. According to a leading Diaspora theorist, Avtar Brah, the concept of Diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins. Home, for the people in exile epitomizes attachment and a sense of belongingness. A desire for a place called 'home' which is attached with a sense of belongingness has been expressed by the characters from the beginning of the story. However, it is noteworthy that, this desire for a home is not always occupied by a desire to return.

Jen, through the characters of Ralph, Helen and Theresa, addresses questions of home, belongingness, identity and the Great American dream. She challenges the myth of the Great American Dream, which is widely accepted to be the main aim of the immigrants in the New World. Part one of the novel, addresses Ralph's experiences and hardships in the foreign land to which Theresa comes as a relief. All the three characters, in their own little ways undergo the process and challenges of assimilation. Occupying the in between space, the characters exhibit divided yearnings. As for instance, Helen's life in China seemed to be perfect. For the Chinese, Jen states, "removal is a fall and exile" (Jen 61). They prefer to hold still. Helen expresses her apprehensions of carving for herself a niche in the strange world separated from her home by a "violent, black ocean" (Jen 62). Caught between two worlds, Helen tries to hold on to her old Chinese ways by cooking Chinese food and visiting Chinatown in America three times a week. She also regularly writes to her parents, anticipating a reply from her homeland. Helen can be viewed in the light of Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a process of becoming rather than an inherited affiliation. She tried developing a liking for the American way of life and began reading American magazines, newspapers and listening to the American shows.

However, despite their gradual movement towards a more Americanized life, they still hold on to their old faith. Simultaneously they celebrated the Chinese New year as well as the American New Year. Jen, here can be claimed to have been debunking the East West polarities and is presenting an all embracing wider notion of Diaspora self, thus challenging the traditional notion of homesickness and nostalgia to be the only preoccupation of the Diaspora subject. Jen's version of Diaspora self does not solely resides in a state of denial of the new changes that the person encounters in the New land. Instead, her Diaspora self speaks of striking a balance between the past life and the present. She underscores a peaceful negotiation with the changes and the creation of a negotiated space of harmony.

Jen in the novel foregrounds, what Bhabha terms as "Third Space", which according to him is a space of reconciliation of two cultures (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 37). This 'in between' space is the interstices between two cultures which gives rise to a new and pluralistic culture. In the novel, the characters can be seen to inhabit this space of reconciliation. It can be argued that Jen's space of reconciliation rests on a wider notion of assimilation which embraces both the culture.

The characters in the novel are in a constant state of becoming through a host of daily practices. Through this, the Diaspora self is constantly engaged in a process of creation of a sense of belonging to the host country. The immigrants try to make peace with the constant inflow of socio-cultural changes. This is clearly evident when Helen married Ralph by renting a "western style, white gown with a matching veil" (Jen, *Typical American* 58). The ceremony took place in a chapel following the Christian principles. Apart from their daily activities of 'performing' to be an American, this is one major event where their efforts of assimilating into the culture of the host country is quite prominent. Other instances include their efforts of speaking English and having food at three o' clock on a Sunday since it was an "American style" (Jen 91). Further, it is worth mentioning that the changing of their Chinese names to American ones also calls attention to their efforts of becoming an American and their pining for the myriad of possibilities that accompanies this newfound identity. At the very outset, after arriving in America, Ralph changed his name from Yifeng Chang to Ralph Chang. Theresa, Ralph's sister also picked the English name Helen for her friend Hailan. They named themselves as changkees, imitating the Yankees, the American professional baseball team. With time slowly passing by, they moved to a bigger house, a luxurious one with a basement and an attached garage.

Jen crafts the story of the three immigrants and their course of life that began by disliking everything that is typical American and ended being typical American themselves. A typical American according to them is of no good, lacks morals and is individualistic in nature unlike the Chinese who believed in a shared living. Jen provides the readers with little instances of collision of Confucian ideals and American ways of life. In spite of these collisions and clashes, the immigrant family manages to thrive in the strange land.

Despite their desire to be Americanized, they also retained their Chinese ideals and teaching. For instance, the essentialist Chinese idea of “Xiang Banfa”, suggesting of curving one’s own path in the world full of obstacles have been a refrain throughout the novel when the Changs faced obstacles (Jen 27). This reminds us of John W Berry, one of the American leading academician who suggested four ‘acculturation strategies’ as a result of the participation and maintenance of the two cultures simultaneously. They are: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. In integration, individuals embrace both cultures of the host culture and culture of origin and maintain in simultaneously. In integration a “mutual accommodation” is required where both the group accept to live as culturally different people (Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation” 10). Integration is also frequently known as biculturalism where the migrants hold on to the ideals of the homeland as well as accept the culture and values of the host land. This tendency of integration is exhibited through the characters in the novel. Apart from participating in the larger social network, the characters in the novel maintain cultural integrity to a great extent.

Ralph’s life takes a turn when he encounters Grover Ding, who proclaims to be the “self made man and a millionaire” (Jen, *Typical American* 106). From there, begins his real chase after the Great American Dream. Eventually he completes his PhD and is blessed with a baby girl, Callie. The third part of the novel, titled “The new life”, introduces the readers to a decent prosperous life of the Changs. Having completed nine years in America, they were happy. Their dreams being materialized, America felt like a paradise. Their Great American dream of prosperity was being attached to material wealth. For instance, the lawn of their neighbor, Arthur Smith was more than “just nature, just life”, it was “America” (Jen 159). Suddenly, America in all its promises, seemed to be larger than life. With Ralph being the Professor Chang, he felt himself climbing up the social ladder. With his fortune rising, Ralph suddenly began experiencing the greatness of America and the freedom and justice that it brought.

The Great American Dream is crucial to understanding Ralph's character. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is at times regarded as the "definitive formulation of the American Dream" (Lemay, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* 21). The New World through its opportunities, allows the man to choose their own, create and recreate. In the simplest of the terms, Franklin proposed the American dream to be a journey from rag to riches. A rise from "impotence to importance, from dependence to independence, from helplessness to power", American dream posits a world of possibilities with liberty of choice (Lemay 21). The philosophy of individualism is core to the achievement of the American dream. It is supposed to be a dream, not only of wealth and prestige but of numerous possibilities. It expounds a philosophy of hope and optimism. For Ralph, the New World is a land of hope and new beginnings. "They're opportunities, those trees, every one of them" initially spoken by Grover occurs as a refrain in the later part of the novel (Jen, *Typical American* 184). It hints at the opportunistic and ambitious nature that Grover had, now being imitated by Ralph. Even in this chasing his goal of achieving the Great American dream, Ralph, heavily influenced by Grover, seems to be imitating him. He feels anything is achievable, when one makes up his mind. Ralph sees striking up a business deal with Grover as a chance of a new life. Here, begins his ardent chase towards the Great American goal. Books on money and success filled Ralph's desk. His obsession with materialism is evident in the following lines: "Money. In this country you, you have money, you can do anything. You have no money, you are nobody. You are Chinamen! Is that simple" (Jen 199).

With his store, "Fried chicken" rising, it seems, Ralph was teaching "money worship" to the daughters (Jen 200). They filled their house with new appliances along with a picture book titled, *Scenic Wonders of America* and planned trips to the Grand Canyon. These small instances provided by Jen hints the readers at the process of becoming an American by these Chinese immigrants. Helen, towards the end of the novel claims her individuality stating that America allows her to marry according to her choice. Ralph was marveling in his business, rising higher and higher but was unaware of Helen's affair with Grover.

However, Helen's changed behavior pricked his mind. "He missed her even as he saw her" writes Jen (Jen 236). Later, Ralph gets cheated by Grover in the deal of the chicken palace. With Ralph's loss of money in the business, Helen continued to look for work and cut down on expenses of their daily activities. Theresa, who earlier left the house because of Ralph's

behavior decided to reunite with her family again. Though being Americanized to a certain degree, Theresa holds on to her Chinese ideals of reunification.

In addition to that, Ralph's miscalculations on the addition of the building and Theresa's accident because of Ralph's rash driving brings in a major twist to the novel. Ralph struggles for survival again. The story from rags to riches is now reversed. With Theresa struggling for her life, they wondered if death was possible in that "bright country" (Jen 286). With his sinking business, discovery of Helen's affair with Grover and Theresa's battle with life, Ralph found everything to be in distortion. "America, was no America", Jen writes (Jen 296). Ralph's dream of America as a place of hope, prosperity and success shattered. The last chapter of the novel, titled "faith", however adds a positive note. The recovery of his sister came across as a miracle for Ralph. He was reminded of the simplicity of the childhood and rendered him hope of recovery from the spiritual and personal crises he underwent. He felt, "to go back in, would seem somehow to be making no progress" (Jen 295), and therefore refrained to go back to the apartment and hire a cab to the hospital to see Theresa. At the end, as reality hit him hard, he was reminded of beautiful days of togetherness which still keeps the flame of hope burning in his heart.

A kind of ambivalence is foregrounded in the novel. Propounded by Bhabha, ambivalence refers to a simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards an action or a thing. Bhabha employed this concept to comprehend the colonizer/colonized relation. When applied to the Diaspora predicament, the characters can be seen expressing attraction and repulsion simultaneously towards the American culture. Caught between the two contending forces, the host culture and the native culture, Jen unveils the perplexity and the intricacy of the predicaments of the Diaspora subject. Many occurrences in the novel stand as testimony to this. Jen writes that Helen, "resigned herself to her new world, something had taken over her – a drive to make it hers" (Jen 76). This gives the readers an impression of Helen's desire to assimilate entirely into the American culture. However, Jen bemuses the readers when the next moment Helen considers the Americans as manner less recalling an incident when an American women squeezed Helen's hand as a gesture of sympathy. The New World, because of the endless possibilities

turns to a paragon of liberty, where they are the masters of their own mind. Yet, there are certain facets of this world that Helen disapproves. Time and again, the characters remind each other of their Chinese values and morals. This leads to the creation of an ambivalent self which involves simultaneous attraction towards some facets and repulsion towards others. Jen, throughout the novel plays very well with this disconcerted predicament of the characters, thus calling attention to the indeterminacy and unsettling nature of the immigrants. She treats assimilation as a natural process. However, she highlights certain patterns of assimilation which might either stimulate or impede the growth of the Diaspora self. It can be argued that she calls for a ‘selective assimilation’ which refers to the acceptance of selected facets, changes of the American culture that appeal to the Changs.

Jen’s characters occupy what in Pratt’s words would be a contact zone where disparate cultures meet leading to a series of complicated engagements and thus, a continuous process of give and take comes into play. The ethnicity of the characters play a powerful role as an identifier when they resort to their Chineseness to defend their actions against the American immoral ways. Occupying that contact zone leads to the evolution of a mixed and dynamic culture which gains expression through the term hybridity. The ‘in between space’ occupied by the migrants witness the two contending forces of assimilation and assertion which leads us to the metaphor of a “salad bowl” which is often used to describe the multicultural milieu of America. The metaphor of a ‘salad bowl’ refers to the integration of variegated cultures while simultaneously maintaining their separate identities. However, assimilation of the immigrants when sought by the dominant group, according to Berry leads to the creation of “melting pot” which exhibits a homogenizing tendency, thus overlooking the individualities of the ethnicities. In contrast to the metaphor of a “melting pot”, Jen’s novels exhibit a tendency of biculturalism. The space of negotiation between the two identifications of being an American and Chinese offers possibilities of a culturally hybrid self which shall embrace the cultural differences as forms of cultural diversity.

This complex form of cultural amalgamation directly influences the formation of the Diaspora self. With the diverse factors coming into force, a question arises if the Diaspora self is completely subjective. As seen in the novel, an element of relativity is attached to Ralph’s understanding of his self. The socio cultural forces as well as the relationships mould his understanding of his self. It can be argued that Jen, through Ralph,

foregrounds a “malleable self” which is shaped according to the demands of the situation. Thus, debunking the earlier notions of a fixed and a subjective self, Ralph’s Diaspora self is presented as a malleable one. Moreover, the identities of Helen and Theresa are in a continuous process of becoming and is never static. From a poor immigrant, to a professor and then to a self made man, Ralph’s understanding of his self continuously evolves through failures and success. In the world of conflicts, Jen resists a coherent understanding of self. This can be examined in the light of the critical tradition of multiphrenia by Kenneth Gergen. Caught in the web of relationships, the traditional idea of a single coherent self is replaced by a fragmented and decentred self. Ralph’s relation with Theresa, Helen and Grover Ding paved the path for a variegated understanding of his self. Ralph’s interaction with Old Chao introduces the readers to the scholarly facet of his self and, his interactions with Grover Ding expose his materialistic nature lured by the American dream. Identity, then, is simultaneously subjective and social. Citing the claim of the poststructuralists of a word gaining meaning only in relation to other words, it can be stated that the understanding of Ralph’s self exhibits a similar tendency. Only in relation to other people, the readers are presented with a more vivid, if not complete cognizance of Ralph’s Diaspora self. Ralph’s malleable self, thereby offers possibilities of the creation of multiple selves owing to the culturally hybrid space occupied by the migrants.

In the second novel, Jen takes the understanding of self a step further. Here, through the protagonist, Mona, Jen interrogates and expands the idea of being American with her first-generation. *Mona in the Promised Land* begins where ends *Typical American* ends. After making his mark and fulfilling his American dream, Ralph along with his family settles in an opulent neighborhood in Scarshill. After the economic success, they now own thriving pancake houses. Jen, in the novel by delineating the daily life of the Changs in the multicultural milieu, foregrounds incipient conflicts and discordances veiled under the façade of multiculturalism. She foregrounds a broad understanding of identity formation through a process of continuous flux. Time and again, Jen alludes to the concept of ‘identity switching’ in the novel which is crucial to the understanding of the formation of the Diaspora self in the hostland.

Jen through the character of Mona Chang, Ralph’s daughter, underscores the notion of performativity propounded by Judith Butler in the book *Gender Trouble*. (Butler 15). This notion of performativity foregrounds the performance of certain acts, repeated, consciously or unconsciously.

She upholds that gender is constructed and fluid which is performed through a set of actions. Performance creates a series of effects which, in a way constructs the identity of the subject. This performance of a set of actions by certain characters is pertinent throughout the novel.

An element of performativity is attached to all the identity formations in the novel. Helen, Americanized herself through the performance of a host of activities including speaking the English language and Ralph persists only in being a Chang-kee, a Chinese Yankee. Like wise Mona's process of assimilation into the culture of the host country involves the acquisition of habits like piercing her ears, smoking and sleeping with boys, which, otherwise, her Chinese heritage would have never allowed. This process of assimilation seems more like a permission of acceptance in to the host culture by adhering to certain normative practices which seem to be a part of a subculture. Similar to Mona, Callie is urged by her black roommate, Naomi, to revisit her Chinese ancestry. Adopting her Chinese name, Callie began performing her Chinese identity by wearing traditional Chinese clothes including Chinese padded jackets, cloth shoes and relishing Chinese dishes.

Mona's transformation from a Chinese to a Catholic and then a Jew foregrounds the fluid nature of identity. Jen, in a way, challenges the notion of 'ethnic nativism', which according to Mona, people like Miss Feeble will always "keep the subject shiny" (Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* 32). After her adoption of Judaism, Mona finds herself being actively engaged in the temple activities and also in numerous Youth Groups. Apart from studying Jewish history, Mona participates in Jewish rituals and befriends Jewish youths and eventually marries Seth Mandel, a Jewish man. Mona under the influence of her friend Barbara, continues to be Jewish who herself undertook a journey of self discovery of her Jewish roots. This bold act of conversion at the young age of sixteen, stems from Mona's ardent desire for freedom and independence. The New world, for Mona, is an embodiment of promises of liberation and progress. Debunking the notion of an inherited and stable identity, Jen crafts a more liberating idea of free play of identity.

Apart from Mona, Seth, a Jewish boy, performs the identity of, Chinese, hippie, black, WASP, and Native American. As Jen writes, "He lives in a tepee; uses chopsticks; practices yoga; sleeps on a tatami mat; wears dashikis" (Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* 112). He also exhibits Eastern tendencies by wearing a Nehru jacket and gifted himself some sitar tapes.

This can be viewed in the light of Anthony Giddens's argument that, self identity is not given but is created by the reflexive activities of the individual. Instead of prioritizing his ethnic identity, Seth made himself accessible to other possibilities of identity and switches among them accordingly. His shifts led to the creation of an inconsistent and divided self which celebrates racial hybridity thus challenging the essentialization of his ethnic identity.

It is noteworthy that Mona was straddled between the promising call of liberation and her relational facet of her identity. The relational aspect of her identity demands her formation of her self in relation to her family. Perhaps, for this discordance, she was caught between her loyalty towards the Temple Youth group and her parents' pancake houses.

In the novel, Jen hints the readers at ethnicity to be an unstable identity which is in a constant process of becoming. She captures different voices in the novel that constantly talk about their identity. Their identity is fluid and performative. She raises deeper questions if identity can be changed based on a host of daily practices or on a whim like Mona's decision of religion conversion.

Jen's narrative offers a critique of the multicultural propensity to homogenize diverse ethnic groups. Multiculturalism refers to the political philosophy which refers to the diverse ethnic groups that function together in society by preserving their distinctive ethnic and cultural characteristics. Instead, she foregrounds the inherent conflicts and tensions that seem to accompany the efforts of assimilation. The incipient intergenerational conflicts in the Chang family paves the path for new dimensions in understanding the complicated formation of Diaspora self. The Changs occupy a contentious space where Chinese values and normative practices of American ways of life seem to exist in a simultaneous manner.

Helen occasionally reminds her daughters of their Chinese values and the proper manners of a Chinese daughter. In contrast to her family members, she believes, they belong more to the society. These values of Helen are rooted in the Chinese heritage of Daoism and Confucianism.

This disparate understanding of self in the Western and Asian culture has been an interesting topic of debate in recent scholarship. Many scholars have foregrounded the distinction between Western individualism and the traditional Chinese manner of perceiving an individual.

According to the Chinese thoughts, an individual person is defined by his association to a community, the culture and the social roles assigned to the person. The relative aspect of one's identity plays a crucial role in Chinese tradition. The identity of a son or a daughter can help one achieve one's personhood. Along with Confucianism, Daoism too is crucial to the Chinese heritage. The individual is perceived as a holistic being and a part of nature by both these traditions. The relationship between the individual person and the community or state, according to these beliefs is never static but always in a process.

The intergenerational conflict or dissonance, especially between Helen and her daughter stems from their different belief system which they tend to follow. Mona's conversion of religion to Judaism further aggravates their conflict. Like Helen, who believed that one can marry according to their own choice in America, Mona too believes that in American they can pursue or perform an identity according to their wish. The New World for Mona brings in promises of abundant liberty and possibilities of an individual independent identity. Mona's perception of her self stems from a sense of double consciousness which is the result of the convergence of her Chinese ideals of interdependency and American ideals of individualism. In the western culture, the idea of individual liberty prevails in contrast to Chinese understanding of a relative self. Her emerging sense of self, in a way rises from diverging cultural paths.

"America means being whatever, you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish" claims Mona (Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* 49). Mona's claiming of her religious freedom as an individual right further triggers the intergenerational conflict. Filial piety is crucial to Chinese heritage, according to which obeying parents is the prime duty of the children. Mona by repudiating to submit to the ideal, performs non filial actions and moves way from 'being Chinese'. Her fervent love for individual liberty, according to Helen might want Mona to 'pick' to be a Black or even a 'tree' (Jen 49). However, it is ironical that, despite her reiteration of her Chinese ways of life, Helen claims to be Westernized and brags about the English speaking skills of her Chinese children. She would have preferred Mona to have transformed herself completely to an American, rather than Jewish. This is perhaps because, the Jewish community is relatively a minority one, and Helen does not prefer identifying herself with the minority community.

Apart from the intergenerational conflicts, Jen also underlines the discordance and racist tendencies camouflaged under the ‘all embracing’ tendency of multiculturalism. Jen underscores the racist tendencies in multicultural America through the black character, Alfred, thereby foregrounding the darker facets of multiculturalism. Alfred, the Negro works as a cook in the Changs’ pancake house. On one occasion, Cedric, the head cook interrogates Alfred on burning some pancakes. Alfred retaliates saying, “Black is beautiful” to which Cedric replies “Black is burnt” (Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* 208). Later on, he complains to Mona expressing his disgust over Alfred’s behavior and being tired of dealing with the blacks. Mona expresses her abhorrence over Cedric’s racist comment and she claims that it is Alfred, not just black people. This seemingly insignificant incident foregrounds the intricate functioning of racism. Both Alfred and Mona can be seen claiming an individual identity of being a person independent of any racial obligations. Later, Alfred is fired by the Changs for misbehaving with a white customer, which according to Helen is a big issue and apprehended Mona for supporting Alfred. This incident further aggravates the antagonism between Mona and her mother. This incident at Changs’ pancake house is crucial in comprehending Mona’s sense of individuality and subsequently the assertion of it. While Helen repeatedly reminds Mona of her filial duties, Mona considers those obligations as an undue compulsion and a rigorous suppression of her individuality. She bursts out saying, “That’s the whole problem. I’m not just a daughter. I’m a person, a person” (Jen 221). Mona expresses her desire to have a mind of her own instead of a role playing of her ethnic ideals to please her parents. Indifferent to Mona’s desires, Helen considers Americanization to be the root cause of Mona’s unruly behavior. Helen also considers Mona’s conversion to be the root cause of all the problems and bans all her contact with the outside world. Despite Helen’s efforts to enforce Chinese ideals of filial piety in Mona, she continuously claims her right to liberty. “It’s a free country. This is America”, claims Mona (Jen 228). America, asserts Mona allows her to act out her own mind. Nevertheless, the conflict gets heated to the level of Mona leaving her house, another non filial decision for a Chinese daughter. Jen writes “Behind her no history. Before her – everything”, thus anticipating a promising future (Jen 230).

Modeled on the conditions of everyday speech, Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is applicable to the multiple voices that surfaces in the novel. The dialogic nature of the novel, which foregrounds variegated viewpoints, is crucial to the comprehension of the novel. Bakhtin’s Dialogism, also underscores the dynamic and relational aspect of language.

It requires the presence of differences which are connected through communication to incite new ideas and positions. This leads to Bakhtin's next concept which is heteroglossia, characterized by a diversity of social speech types. The characters act as a medium through which social diversity enters the novel. In the novel, social diversity is pertinent. The characters through, their speech exposes the readers to its heteroglossic nature. A nuanced understanding of racist viewpoints is expressed through the characters and their language. In contrast, Mona upholds, anti nativism and an anti racist discourse which can be typified as a discourse of post modern subjectivity. Further, with the birth of Io, the novel progresses beyond the notion of identity switching or the mere performance one's identity. Io is born to the Chinese mother Mona and Jewish father Seth. An example of anti racial hybridity, Io, appears as the new promising character. Without any efforts of performance, she belongs to two races. Thus, with the introduction of Io, Jen expands the scope of the novel and hints at the creation of a post modern subjectivity. She moves beyond the performance of an American identity and cuts across racial boundaries. It is noteworthy that, the product of difference, Io, emanates a feeling of reconciliation which, according to Kathleen Ker, can be defined as "postmodern hybridity". The concept advocates "multiple and mobile positioning "created by transgression of "national grand narratives" (Ker 379). Thus, any attempt to stabilize identity crumbles in the face of diverse national voices. Constituting an alternative category, Jen also hints at the ardent desire to end racism and its rigidity. It can also be argued that Jen hints at her desire of bridging the gap between the East and the West through peaceful negotiation and acceptance of cultural, social, religious racial differences.

The concept of the Self and the Other is inevitable to the understanding of human consciousness. The concept, in the simplest of term posits a binary understanding of differences. An ideological, social, cultural and psychological construction, the concept of self/other proves effective in deciphering the nuanced and intricate relations of race, gender, and religion. Initially in the novels, Jen mentions about Ralph hiding from the sights of immigration officials since he forgot to renew his visa. He began looking for a place to work where only Chinese people will be present. Jen in a way, highlights the stringent immigration laws of America. The concept of self/other is intrinsic to it. There are other instances where viewing one's self against the other is prominent. Berry proposes a model where, in the margins lie the minorities with the dominant group in the centre. At times, it is assumed that these minority groups should be subsumed under the larger category thus exhibiting an inclusive attitude which forcefully containing differences.

However, Gish Jen deconstructs this centre/ margin polarity and instead propounds alternative possibilities of multiple selves thus celebrating racial indeterminacy. She proposes an understanding of self which goes beyond the polarity of self/other and anticipates, in Arjun Appadurai's words a "Diaspora of hope". (Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* 6). There lies hope in the untangling of cultural differences and rises possibilities of alternative formations of self in the diaspora. In the second novel, she debunks the self/other polarity and explores the alternative possibilities between the spectrum of self/ other. As for instance, Mona's relation with her African American characters led her to consider her position as a 'yellow', between and beyond the problematic binary of white and black. This ideological, psychic and societal construction of positing one ideal existence against the other have been challenged by Jen. The characters do not adhere to this binary. Instead they focus on free play of identity. A comparison can be drawn with the Moroccan conception of self as explained by Lui Xin in the book, *The Otherness of Self* (111). This Moroccan conception of Self foregrounds the significance of the contextual comprehension of the inherent qualities of an individual. The understanding of the self according to this perspective varies according to the situations. Thinking along the lines of Moroccan conception of self, contextual comprehension is crucial to Mona's understanding of her evolving self. From being a Chinese to an American and then a Jew, a host of external activities along with her immanent qualities is crucial to her understanding of her Self.

Thus, a gradual development of self can be traced through her novels. From the creation of Ralph's malleable self to his grandchild's Io's post modern hybrid self, it seems that the formation of self is a continuous and ever evolving process. It is noteworthy that, differing in time and space, the second generation immigrants holds wider possibilities of creation of a liberated sense of self which cuts across all the racial, cultural and psychic boundaries. The Diaspora created by the Chang family is of hope, new opportunities and liberation where the rigid boundaries of race and culture are blurred. The philosophy of change being the only constant in life is crucial to Jen's theory of the self. From, Yifeng Chang to Ralph Chang and from Mona Chang to Mona Changowitz, it has been a journey of self discovery, thus challenging the traditional notions of integration. Jen's philosophy of growth involving change and change entailing loss is manifested in her characters. Both Ralph's and Mona's journey of their new found identity involves growth, change and loss. This complicated process leads to the formation of a Diaspora self which, transcending the territorial, social, cultural and psychic moorings speaks of hope, liberation and harmony.

Chapter III

Migration, (Be)longing and Memory

“War has no beginning and end. It crosses oceans like a splintered boat filled with people singing a sad song”

(Thuy, *The Gangster We are all Looking For* 87)

The chapter titled “Migration, (Be)longing and Memory” engages with crucial questions that migration arouses. The chapter particularly deals with migration which has been thrust upon the people of South Vietnam. Their forced exile as a result of the tragic consequences of the Vietnam War and their process of settlement in America raises deeper questions of belonging, longing and memory. The process of displacement here is assumed to be intertwined with the notions of longing, belonging and memory. With the forced uprooting of people, there arises conflict between their adaptation to their host culture as well as their allegiance to their native land. (Be)longing here is used as a double edged term which foregrounds the efforts of the newly arrived migrants to assimilate in the new world as well as their nostalgia for their native land. This sense of belonging is characterized by memories of their homeland. Memory, the act of remembrance is crucial to the lives of refugees. This remembrance proves to be traumatic at times and therapeutic in other times in healing the minds of the refugees. Memory is inextricably linked with questions of identity, nationalism, power and authority and has always been conceived as an individual phenomenon and possession. With the aim of delving deep into human nature, theories of identity formation conceptualizes memory as instrumental to the development of the self. Along with the individual accounts of memory and individual identity, there exists the notion of collective identity. Memory is always related to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, and is vulnerable to appropriations and manipulations.

Hardships in Vietnam and the process of exile have become a dominant family narrative for the Vietnamese people. Their shared story of struggle shapes understanding and the behavior of the displaced people. Thus, the chapter is an attempt to probe deeper into the questions of displacement and raises significant questions arising regarding the remembrance, narration and

the sharing of trauma. The chapter also addresses the Diasporic predicaments shaped by the past memories and also the dynamic nature of memory and its role in the formation of the Diaspora self.

Collective memory and trauma shall provide the guiding framework for analysis. In its simplest definition, collective memory refers to the memories shared by a community about the past. These collective memories are passed down to generations. It is noteworthy that memory and history play a crucial role in shaping one's identity. One's cultural and historical memories enhance one's understanding of self. Maurice Halbwachs, the French philosopher and sociologist, too, following Durkheim's ideas establishes the notion of memory as being collective in nature. She propounds the concept of "collective memory" which is socially constructed (Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* 22). Individual memory is perceived in relation to a group, be it a family or a community. Individual identity is derived from the shared memory and a collective history. Collective memory, by enabling people to reconstruct their past experiences collectively integrates a group through time and space.

An understanding of the historical backdrop of the works selected shall provide a vivid and detailed understanding of the texts. Set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, it is significant to understand the causes and the ramifications of the historic war.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 led to the formation of one of the largest refugee group in America. A historical understanding of the Vietnamese Diaspora in America unveils the gruesome effects of the Vietnam War. The long years of fight between the North and South Vietnam ends with the fall of Saigon in 1975. North Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh and South Vietnam by Ngo Dinh Diem were pitted against each other through their contradictory ideologies and alliances. The U.S government with the objective of restraining the spread of Communism extended its supports towards South Vietnam and its anticommunist policies. However, internal conflicts emerged when Diem's preference towards Catholicism in the South Vietnam created strong resentment among people, considering it as a challenge towards their religion, Buddhism. This disagreement between the state and the people led to the formation of an insurgent group which is known as Viet Cong in the South. With strong support from North Vietnam, this group of Vietnamese guerilla fighters opposed the South Vietnamese government. Later, Diem's rule was overthrown by a military coup. Taking advantage of the weak government of South

Vietnam, the American government sent troops to South Vietnam to complete control over it. However, the success of the plan seemed unlikely because of the collaboration of Viet Cong and the Viet Minh troops. Later, at the Paris Peace talks in 1973, the American government decided to withdraw the American forces in Vietnam and also its support towards the South Vietnam Government. As a result, the government of South Vietnam weakened and its capital, Saigon was captured by the North Vietnamese troops. Later, under the Hanoi regime, Vietnam was reunited and Saigon was renamed as the city of Ho Chi Minh.

Along with a heavy casualty, the Vietnam War fought for 20 long years also led to the tragic displacement of millions of people. The fall of Saigon marked the beginning of waves of forced migration. Vietnamese refugees fled Vietnam in significant waves. Min Zhou, in the article, “The experience of Vietnamese refugee children in the U.S” foregrounds the three significant waves of migration. The first wave consisted of a section of the Vietnamese Elite people. The second wave towards the late 1970s consisted of thousands of refugees who travelled across the South China Sea in overcrowded boats to reach the refugee camps. Many Vietnamese refugees sheltered themselves in refugee camps during their period of waiting for sponsorship. This wave of refugees were famously known as Boat people who survived the perilous journey in large ships. This group of refugees bore indelible marks of hardship, trauma and starvation throughout the journey. Thousands of them perished at the sea and the rest landed up in different refugee camps in the American soil. This wave of refugees posed a challenge for the American government and initially was not granted the immigrant status. The hardship of these boat people at sea as well as in the concentration camps stands as a testimony to the tragic aftermath of America’s defeat in Vietnam. The communist victory that has ended the Vietnam War thus resulted in long years of refugee crises. Literature, very well captures this crises of the refugees, thus presenting before people the bleak past of Vietnam. The third wave which occurred in 1980s, consisted boat people as well as people leaving under the U.S orderly program.

Given this historical backdrop, there emerged a need to render voice to the voiceless. This group of people, forced to migrate are often viewed as controversial and threatening subjects. Viet Thanh Nguyen, the Vietnamese American novelist, in his work *The Displaced* writes, “It would be so much easier to call myself an immigrant, to pass myself off as belonging

to a category of migratory humanity that is less controversial, less demanding and less threatening than the refugee” (Nguyen 1). Nguyen, in the book claims the refugees to belong to a different category of people who experiences themselves owing to their socio-historical background. He calls for a moral responsibility for people like him who achieved the immigrant status from being refugees, to acknowledge the existence of the new refugees, tending to make their process of assimilation a bit easier. Literature too upholds this responsibility of unveiling the refugee experience to the world, and introduce people to their perilous journey. This is done, not with the intention of gaining sympathy but to acknowledge their contribution to the nation building process of the host country. Along with Viet Thanh Nguyen, there are writers including Thanhha Lai and Le Thi Diem Thuy, who, in their writing foregrounds the tragic aftermath of the Vietnam War, thus reflecting their own journey from being refugees to immigrants. Both of them are Vietnam born authors and witnessed the violence of the war. They fled Vietnam as refugees and later achieved the immigrant status. Their literary contributions are crucial to the understanding of who they are, where they arrived from and their responsibilities they have towards people still searching for a home.

Wars are common form of sources of collective memory. The Vietnam War, which divided the lives of the people into before and after timelines, is no exception. The war left a deep imprint on the minds of people who fled Vietnam in huge numbers as refugees. In the recollections of the war, there exists social significance in the individual remembrances. The individuals recollect the past relying on the frameworks of the social memory. In the theoretical tradition of Halbwach’s, collective memory will be instrumental in comprehending the formation of Vietnamese American identities with a shared past circumscribed by war. This notion of collective identity is evident in the theoretical traditions of Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and Paul Connerton who maintain that collective identity, formed out of collective memory is an ongoing process.

Thanhha Lai’s evocative novel in verse, *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) traces the journey of Ha and her family from Vietnam to Alabama. Little Ha and her family fled Vietnam to save themselves from the gruesome effects of the Vietnam War. The novel traces their arduous and painful process of displacement and their process of assimilation into the culture of the hostland. It is a moving tale of Ha’s year of change, dreams, grief and finally healing as she travels from

one nation to the other. Ha documents her experiences through the journal entries of her diary in the poetic form of free verse which spans over eleven months, and the first month of the succeeding year. Her journal entries add an element of authenticity to her tales of displacement and trauma. Writing, for the girl, comes as a source of solace and venting out her suppressed anger and anxiety which is generally seen as one of the significant ways for people to deal with their traumatic memories.

With the similar backdrop of the Vietnam War, Le Thi Diem Thuy's acclaimed novel *The Gangster We are all Looking For* (2003), unveils the life of a Vietnamese family through the eyes of a child struggling to find her voice and place in the new country. Set in 1978, in the novel the little girl is a keen observer of the world around her and longs for a reunion with her mother. The story traces her difficult journey into adulthood through ghostly traumas, memories of her dead brother and the hopeless rage of her father, who suffers from post-war traumatic disorder. Narrated by the child refugee, the tale captures the brutal reality of the refugee life onboard, the drowning of the brother and the father's post-war traumatic experiences. The novel traces the narrator's growth to adulthood and her return to Vietnam twenty years later. The novel is non-chronological in nature, with water, being the prime imagery. The author, with her description of the past events recounts in an intense and detailed manner, the memories and people relinquished, and, their nightmarish experiences in the New World.

It is crucial to note that both the stories are narrated through the lens of child survivors of the Vietnam War. The experiences of the child narrators raise deeper questions of assimilation and acceptance. Straddled between two worlds, they experience conflicting pressures of assimilation as well as their moral responsibility of ethnic loyalty. Their comprehension of the past and their refugee status shall unveil their understanding of their self in the new world.

Thanhha Lai in the beginning of the novel, *Inside Out and Back Again* evokes the approaching of the war. The first part of the novel captures all the significant events associated with the life of Kim Ha, the protagonist. Lai beautifully evokes the material aspects of her memory associated with her homeland which later on, paves the path for nostalgia. Beginning from the celebration of the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, the author records Ha's intense and innocent love for her papaya tree and the celebration of her birthday with her dear ones. In the verse titled, "Unknown father", the author introduces us to Ha's father whom she never met. Her

father existed only in the stories of her mother. Ha, admits of knowing only about the “small things”, including her father’s love for stewed eels and pastries (Lai 22). His hatred for the afternoon sun, the colour brown and brown rice can only be felt in her imagination. However, her father being captured by the communists introduces the readers to the gloomy memories of her childhood. Ha desperately daydreams of her father returning in white navy uniform one day and relieving her mother from all the stress. Ha’s family, along with grappling with the separation from the father also has the reality of the Vietnam War dawning upon them with the sound of the bombs like slashes of thunder across the sky and “gunfire falling like rain” (Lai 48). War, then, for them is “not that far at all” (Lai 49). It is then that they decide to flee, leaving behind trails of memory including Ha’s favourite papaya tree. Ha’s intense pain of separation from the papaya tree is reflected when she describes Brother Vu chopping the tree and the “black seeds spill like clusters of eyes wet and crying” (Lai 60). Her sense of nostalgia is rooted in her memories; both collective and individual. Her journey of displacement over the South China Sea along with thousands of refugees in overcrowded boats forms her collective aspect of memory. In order to escape from Vietnam, they board an overcrowded boat where “families stick together like wet pages” and shared a single mat (Lai 61). Lai’s narrative evokes in the readers a vivid picture of the tragic and pathetic circumstances under which they fled. The countless people pouring in and the bombs exploding in the sky with its sparks all around hint the readers at the terrific circumstances faced by the boat people including Ha’s family. Finally, a commander delivers the bitter news that Saigon is gone which adds to the pain of the people. Lai’s evocative verse introduces the readers to Ha’s peaceful childhood as well as the painful transition and thus sets the ground for further traumatic events. As described, until ten years of her life, Ha only knew the vibrant market places of Saigon and its rich traditions along with the warmth of the people. However, the fall of Saigon marks an end to her blissful life thus marking a beginning of her journey to her new life.

In the second portion of the novel titled “At sea”, Lai foregrounds the heart wrenching process of displacement of Ha and her family along with thousands of refugees across the South China Sea in overcrowded boats. Surviving on “one clump of rice” and chewing it slowly to not let it get over soon, is one of the many pathetic hardships they faced (Lai 79). As days pass by, Vietnam, for Ha seems to be a distant memory. This tragic process of displacement forms Ha’s collective memory. This results in the formation of a collective identity as boat people. This

collective nature of identity has been foregrounded by the theorist Paul Connerton in his work “How Societies Remember?”. With the roots in Emile Durkheim’s notion of collective consciousness, Connerton’s collective memory is associated with the recollections of a shared past. There exist discourses which are socially constructed and are rooted in the collective memory. This, in turn, triggers the creation of social solidarity. In the novel, the displaced people are bonded together through the collective identity of being boat people. Ha and her family shares a bond of social solidarity through their collective suffering. The constant fear of being caught fleeing by the communists haunts Ha’s mother and the other fellow refugees. In the unsettled times of constant change, they gather satisfaction at the fact that the moon remains unchanged. The moon is perceived as a symbol of bonding between them and their lost father. They believe that somewhere their father might be looking at the same moon, thus emanating a feeling of togetherness in their separation.

Their life in the refugee camp in Quam and then in Florida is a crucial aspect of their displacement. Their “life in waiting” in the refugee camps forms another significant aspect of her collective memory. Sharing the common experiences of being refugees, Ha’s refugee experiences at the camps of Quam and Florida is crucial to her formation of a collective memory and identity. As for instance, the refugees are being prepared for their new life in America by the camp workers who teach them English during morning and afternoon. All the refugees desperately waited for sponsors. Many refugees preferred to land up in America, as according to them, America is a land of opportunities. After sharing divided opinions on the city that they should prefer, Ha’s family finally opted for Alabama. It is noteworthy that Lai presents the crises through the lens of an innocent girl. Her depiction of the seemingly unimportant events and objects surprisingly bears the power to evoke the deepest of feelings in the hearts of the readers. As for instance, in the middle of the crises, when they were grappling with serious issues of survival, Ha regrets for not having her doll with her.

Ha’s arrival in America initiates the complex process of assimilation and adaptation to the culture of the host country. Lai, through Ha and her family foregrounds the racist tendencies inherent in the generosity of the land. The traces of this tendency can be observed during the adoption of families when they learn that the sponsors prefer Christian refugees. Their initial effort at assimilating into the host country could be seen in her mother’s insistence on the belief of the similarity of all the faiths. In a sense, for her mother, changing their religion,

would be of no harm. Ha's mother knew that learning English would be instrumental in their process of assimilation into the foreign culture. Learning English is made their first priority. Ha struggles to comprehend the complications of the English language. With the help of Brother Quang who instructs them to add an "s" to nouns to make them plural, Ha for the first time, learns that knife becomes knives. Ha being unaware of those intricacies has to take special attention in forcing the sounds out of her mouth. Later on, Miss Washington introduced Ha to the grammar rules leaving her more confused. This effort of learning English can be perceived as their initial effort at assimilating into the foreign culture. Further, it is noteworthy that in Alabama, their host suggests that Ha's family should be baptized. Changing themselves into white gowns, they underwent the rituals after which their host's wife now ratifies their presence and embraces them. However, that same night Ha's mother engages with some Buddhist rituals, using bowls and orange peels instead of incense and gongs. The author here foregrounds their dual loyalties towards their ethnicity and also towards the foreign culture. Further, the exchange of pre Christmas gifts as well as Ha's participation in Halloween are other instances of their effort to be accepted by the foreign land. Despite their efforts of assimilation, their pain of displacement and struggle of survival in the new land cannot be overlooked. In her mother's prayers, Ha noticed her yearning for her father. "It is more difficult here than I imagined", says Ha's mother (Lai 178). Like her mother's yearning for her father, Ha too longs for the warmth of her papaya tree.

In the discussion on formation of one's self as Vietnamese Americans, the concept of race is unavoidable. As mentioned by Robert Miles in the book *Theories of Race and Racism* (2000), migration which is a precondition of interaction of human beings, leads to the creation of "other". This process of othering triggers the representation of people through images and beliefs which establishes differences when compared to the self. Themes of racialization underlie Ha's description of her life at Alabama. Time and again, Ha's family encountered negligence during everyday activities in the public arena. It noteworthy that Ha's passage to adulthood and her effort at assimilation is not a simplified one. Their arrival at Alabama sets the ground for their efforts of assimilation and also the racial hatred that they would encounter in their new journey.

The beginning verse "Unpack and repack" of the third part of the novel titled *Alabama* hints at the inherent racist tendencies garbed under the veil of generosity. Ha's family was pleased at the generosity of their host but sooner had to encounter the wife's disapproval at

bringing home a family of Vietnamese refugees without her knowledge. In order to be away from the sight of the wife, the family shifts to the basement, where Ha must stand on a tool placed above a chair too see the sun and the moon. They also adhere to the wife's appeal of staying out of their neighbour's sight. This hints the readers at the position of 'other' occupied by Ha and her family in the New country. The 'other' here is often viewed as inferior to the native group of people. This initial encounter with racism lays the ground for further encounters.

The generous host, however, helps them rent a house and later on sponsors Ha's register to school which introduces her to a host of different cultural practices as well as foregrounds the racist tendencies. Ha's perception of herself as being different from the rest begins with the differing physical appearances. In the class, Ha notices the different hair and skin colour of the students, but fails to understand. Fire hair, honey hair, fuzzy hair, fire hair are far beyond her understanding. She notices that she is the only one with straight black hair and olive skin. Lai portrays the explicit racial differentiation through Ha, when she noticed that one side of the classroom was occupied with light skinned children and the other side with the dark skinned children. Further, in school, Ha is bullied by her friends who described her as a pancake as she, according to them bears a pancake face. Ha realizes that, the flatness of her face triggers such a remark. It is noteworthy that intensifying ethnic differences, irrespective of social or physical objectification leads to racism. For Ha, the comment on her physical features connotes control and conflict. As mentioned in *Little Saigon* by Karin Aguilar, the concept of race is relegated to distinguishing "bodily markings as signs of innate inferiority or superiority" (Aguilar 38). This is applicable to Ha, whose bodily features are seen as tropes of demeaning her. Thus, race can be viewed as a produced and constructed category which marks human bodies based on physical features. Ha's consciousness of her skin colour leads to the understanding of herself as being different from her friends in school. Though racism is performed by a group of prejudiced people, it cannot be denied that it is deeply engraved in the minds and generated and preserved through various discourses and is passed down to generations as in the case of Ha's friends. The category of being an "Asian" is viewed as provocative and thus, Ha and her family encounter racial hatred and segregation.

Assimilating with the new culture becomes more challenging for Ha, even during the smallest of the tasks. During the lunch break at school, Ha struggles with the pink sausage inside the bread as well as a place to sit. She further faces derogatory behavior when a pink boy with

white hair pulls her arm hair, pokes her cheeks and chest, to which she could not do anything but just walk away. Later he and two other friends follow Ha home. She walks fast but does not want to let him see her run. She narrates the incidents to Brother Vu who, promises to teach her self-defense; a way of surviving in the new world.

In the poem titled “Hiding”, Ha expresses her attempts to hide from the world. The effect of racism on the psyche of the little girl is mentally depleting which leads her to stay hidden from the world. She hides in the class by staring at her shoes, eats her lunch in hiding in the bathroom, and hides during the outside time in the same bathroom. She further keeps herself hidden until Brother Khoi drives up to their secret corner. Ha’s act of hiding in an attempt to save herself from the racial torture foregrounds the deep effect of racism in a child’s mind. For Ha, it was difficult to comprehend people’s behavior towards her because she was unaware of America’s history of slavery and the laws of segregation. She witnesses the racial divide for the first time in the simplest of activities which made her aware of being different from the rest. However, she also states that by learning self defense from Brother Vu, she is “practicing herself to be seen” (Lai 161). This hints the readers at Ha’s desire to challenge this offensive behavior and assert her uniqueness.

Ha’s family too was not free from the attacks of racism. People began throwing eggs, toilet papers and bricks at their house. They decided to ask their neighbors for help but they slam their doors on their face. But an older woman named Miss Washington, a widow and a retired teacher welcomes them and volunteers to tutor the family. The family is pleased to meet Mrs. Washington, a generous and helpful person. With their union with Miss Washington, begins Ha’s process of healing. The theme of adaptation arises when Mrs. Washington encourages Ha to make mistakes as a means of learning. She made Ha understand that it is necessary to fail in order to not make the same mistakes again. She encourages Ha to laugh back at people and ask them to speak something in Vietnamese who mock her for her poor English. Despite the numerous instances of bullying and racism, Ha begins to revive her lost self after she knocks down the perpetrators with the lessons by her brother. Once when a butcher hesitated to grind their meat, her mother, for the first time asserted her presence with a loud “Now”. The later verses of the novel titled, “A shift”, “Wow”, “The Vu lee Effect”, foregrounds a gradual change in Ha’s life when people started inviting them to parties. They exchanged Christmas

gifts and also Ha ate the damp strips of papaya which she earlier threw away, thus accepting the situation as it is. This foregrounds her process of healing. In the final part of the novel, “From now on”, they receive the final news of their father’s death and thus their life in waiting for some news of their father ends. The final verses of the novel hint at the desire for a new beginning for Ha and her family. Her brothers too have their own choices in life of being an engineer, a chef, a vet and a lawyer. The novel ends on a positive note with Ha desiring to learn fly kick, not to kick anyone but to fly. This hints the readers at Ha’s desire for freedom and self expression. Miss Washington’s tutoring helps Ha to move from ignorance to knowledge. With her vocabulary increasing, Ha now learns that by screaming “Ha ha ha”, her friends make fun of her instead of calling her by name. She understands their reason behind asking her if she eats Dog meat and wonders if she lived in jungle with tigers. Gaining a new insight to their offensive behavior, Ha now feels ignorance was better. She writes, “I understand and wish I could go back to not understanding” (Lai 168). In the descriptions of Miss Scott, the name of her country sounds sad and bleak. Miss Scott, Ha’s teacher, while introducing Vietnam draws on the bleak images including a burning naked girl and skeletal refugees. Ha felt that this representation of her nation is prejudiced and partial. According to her, she should have mentioned about the Tet celebrations and the papaya tree. The author, through Miss Scott, foregrounds the partial perception of Vietnam by the people of the States. Learning all these, Ha now feels, ignorance for her was bliss. Hà finally understands that she is being harassed due to her ethnic difference, and she wishes she could go back to being naive.

Lai’s novel in verse began with the celebrations of Tet, Vietnamese New year and also ended with the New Year’s celebration. Ha underwent changes, unsettled times and encountered the trauma of being refugees and yet towards the end was successful in fighting back. The formation of Ha’s self is inseparable from the series of events in her life. The novel ends with the Vietnamese family upholding their ethnic loyalty despite their acceptance of the new culture. Ha can be seen constantly exhibiting a sense of nostalgia. Nostalgia can be understood as a longing for a home and bitter sweet yearnings for things of the past. This can be understood through her constant yearning for her papaya tree in South Vietnam. It is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return.

It can be argued that Ha’s act of remembrance is intimate and personal. A socio cultural framework is constantly in work during the entire act of remembrance. This might be the reason behind individuals recalling similar moments and occurrences in entirely different manner.

As for instance, Ha's manner of remembrance provides the readers with an insight into a child recalling traumatic events of the past. For her, the loss of her papaya tree and the vibrant market places of Vietnam was painful. The parents, particularly Ha's can be seen as epitomes of hardships and resilience passing down the tales of survival to their children. However, the second generation more or less envisages an American future amidst the crises, longing for acceptance.

This process of displacement, apart from being painful and nostalgic, can be extremely traumatic for some. The novel, *The Gangster We are all looking For*, narrated through the lens of a child exemplifies this. The novel is anachronistic in nature and is deeply psychological with disjointed events and flashbacks. The child narrator and the father shall be instrumental in analyzing the nature of trauma that they undergo in the hostland. The narrative foregrounds the space of a Vietnamese family as refugees, struggling to find their way and create an identity in the New World. Going through the trauma of displacement, the little girl along with her father and her six uncles reaches San Diego after being adopted by an American family. The drowning of the narrator's brother and her father's traumatic memories of the war is crucial to the narrative. Water plays a significant role in capturing the traumatic memories. The trauma of the death of her brother turns out to be unspeakable and is manifested through hallucination. Only through a proper reconciliation with the traumatic past, the refugees would be able to assimilate into a new culture.

A detailed understanding of trauma and its manifestations shall be crucial to the comprehension of the formation of the Diaspora selves of the protagonists. The mere utterance of the word 'trauma' evokes feelings of horror and fear. The word "trauma" has its origins in the Greek language, meaning a wound which refers to an injury inflicted on a body. Trauma, is widely perceived as a reaction to some catastrophic events of life in the past. In Freudian terms, trauma is perceived as a wound inflicted upon the mind rather than the body. This definition of trauma by Freud foregrounds the deeper psychic implications of trauma. Trauma is an intimate experience and individual's response to horrific events of the past which ultimately, destabilizes one's former understanding of his or her self. The theoretical traditions of trauma theory foreground the works of critics including Freud, Cathy Caruth, Alexander Jeffrey, to name a few. Caruth's understanding of trauma shall be employed as the guiding framework of the discussion.

Cathy Caruth, a significant figure in trauma theory, in her book *Explorations in Memory* defines a traumatic event as experienced, not immediately after the actual event, but later in another

another time and space. This definition of Caruth emphasizes a belated experience of trauma. The past traumatic events resurface through nightmares, flashbacks, incoherent traumatic dreams and obtrusive thoughts. This phenomenon, according to Caruth is known as the post traumatic stress disorder. Historical implications of this phenomenon can be traced back to the occurrence of forceful events with catastrophic outcomes. When viewed in this light, the Vietnam War is one such catastrophic event with deep psychic long lasting impressions. This leads to the understanding of trauma as a culturally specific event related to a historically specific moment.

The novel unveils with the little girl expressing her grief over her separation with her mother. The Vietnam War resulted in a large exodus of people through water. Her mother was unfortunately left behind when she and her father along with her four uncles managed to escape on a boat through the South China Sea. Her mother stood on a beach in Vietnam while her father and his brothers escaped on a boat. Thus, at the very beginning the narrator establishes the bitter memories that the sight of water brings to her mind. Water, here is viewed as a symbol of separation and an unbridgeable distance evoking an uncertainty of reunion with her mother.

It is noteworthy that the narrator feels isolated and her childhood is marked with memories of her father's hopeless rage. At the very beginning, through the use of poignant imagery, the author hints at the father's failure of reconciliation with the past. She writes, "Ba stares at the moon like a lost dog and also crying" (Thuy, *The Gangster We are all Looking For* 8). The child narrator could feel the mental trauma, which she refers as "tide" inside her father's mind. Listening to that tide she could feel and see boats floating everywhere with people "trying to get somewhere" (Thuy 10). The narrator's imagination hints at the intensity of the trauma of displacement that she and her family underwent. There were instances, when the narrator observes her father rolling and crying outside above the ceiling. She fails to understand the reason behind his crying and thus, fails to help him. On other occasions, he turns violent and engages in arguments with his wife and out of anger, "punch walls till he bleeds" (Thuy 92). During extreme cases of his anger, the father smashes television, chases people with knives in daylight and sits in a single position for hours engulfed in darkness. Her father, however, refrains from sharing his past experiences and inner struggle with his family, thus further isolating himself. As the child grows up, she finds her father, further engulfed in loneliness, thus depleting his own mental state. Throughout the novel, her father could be seen suppressing his traumatic experiences which, in a way added to the bleak memories of the narrator's childhood.

In Nguyen's words, Ha's father fought a second war which is against his own mind

which witnessed the horrors of the war. This behavior of the father posed a serious challenge in his adapting to the new life in America. However, towards the end of the novel, the author hints at the possibilities of the father making peace with his trauma. Thus, trauma, for the father, holds the power of bridging the gap between the past and the present. The survivor relives the past through traumatic recollections. The child narrator and the father undergo this belated experience of trauma. The experiences of trauma by the child narrator and her father can be explicated on the basis of the theoretical tradition of Cathy Caruth who regarded belatedness as crucial to experiencing trauma.

On one occasion while returning after buying a bag of ice, the child had strange encounters with her dead brother. She had a feeling of her brother walking beside her which gave her a warm sensation. She felt the physical presence of her dead brother and her mind was filled with questions about his whereabouts. However, there was something that hindered her from embracing her brother. Still she felt her brother to be walking beside her. The feeling was frightening to the core and she ran and ran breathless. After reaching the apartment, she tries to express her unspeakable experience through her broken speech to her mother. "My brother....He wanted me to go... and I wanted to but..." she said (Thuy 75). Words barely made sense to her mother who tried her best to console her. After realizing the presence of other people in the room she returned to the world of reality and wept her heart out. This incident of hallucination expresses her hidden trauma at the death of her brother.

With the death of her brother, the narrator lost a sense of security which could not be provided by anyone else, except her brother. Time and again, she feels the presence of her brother walking beside her. She could feel his warmth so intensely that she could risk leaning with her eyes closed and fall down from a flight of stairs with a firm belief that her brother would be there to catch her. The narrator reflects on the need of the presence of her brother in her life and thus, she clings on to the impossible desire of his return. Her wait for her brother is hindered by an unfathomable obstacle which hints at the impossibility of her desire. Her suppressed trauma of her brother's death is reflected through the repetitive and inconsistent narrative of her dead brother. The author, after stepping into adulthood claims to have stopped looking for her brother but still feels him to be beside her thus foregrounding her inability of making peace with the absence of her brother.

Thuy's protagonist's experience of trauma can be explained in the light of Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma to be repetitive, timeless, unspeakable and contagious. Narratives of trauma hold

the power of creating experiences for those who did not experience it. The Vietnam War refugees experience the intergenerational sharing of trauma, loss and suffering. Collective memories of the violence of the war results in post war traumatic disorder.

Vietnam, for the narrator represents the haunting memories of her brother. These memories later, resulted in traumatic encounters which hinders her adaptation into the new life. Her brother, for her, is an epitome of her life in Vietnam, the recollection of which keeps her connected with her troubled past and thus hinders her growth. Therefore, place undoubtedly is crucial to her understanding of trauma. The physical place of suffering and remembrance turns to a significant source of the explication of the past event which triggered mental turmoil. Place is crucial to the representation of trauma and proves to be a discernible source for the writer to delve deeper into remembrance of losses, pain and suffering. The physical landscape enables the writer to foreground multiple meanings of an event and turns to be a significant trope for understanding of the individual sense of self and identity which is tied to that particular place. Thus, location or place is crucial in understanding the trauma faced by the group of refugees. The historic event of the Vietnam War is crucial to the understanding of the post war traumatic encounters of the father as he served in the Vietnamese army which had deep and long lasting effects. Vietnam, for the father holds bitter memories of his inability in coping with the situations, which, later was further triggered by his unreasonable and uncontrollable rage and alcoholic nature.

It is noteworthy that many a times, in order to avoid her parent's argument, Ha would transform herself into the imaginary world of an ocean and the sound of water. The water imagery here, is instrumental in the recollection of the traumatic death of her brother as well as it brings back the memories of her homeland and connects her to Vietnam. This significance of water is established by the author in the foreword to the novel where she vividly mentions that the Vietnamese word for water, nation and homeland is the same: nuoc. By diverting her thoughts to the sound of water to gain peace, the author reiterates the idea that the thought of her homeland and her brother comforts her mind during the stressful times. Through such activities, the narrator exhibits her tendencies of escapism. This remembrance of her past also can be seen as an expression of nostalgia, to desire return to a past which is impossible. Apart from her own traumatic memories of her brother, the narrator also suffered because of her father's violent nature and unreasonable rage. Thuy, through the two protagonists, foregrounds different ways of dealing with the traumatic past through her protagonists. If her father relied on violence and isolation to deal with his past, the narrator foregrounds an effort of reconciliation with the past.

The sight of water continues to haunt the narrator because years back, her brother lost his life in water. The great South China Sea seemed to have swallowed her brother which is an unforgettable memory for her. The memories of her dead brother haunt her continuously. Her father too is drowned in the trauma of losing his son and ponders if the sea is to be blamed. There are many instances through which the intense trauma of the child narrator at losing her brother can be felt. On one occasion, the narrator, leaning over the mouth of a well gave her father the impression as if she lost something in the water, which she “could not see much less retrieve”(Thuy 144). After the death of her brother, the women in her house were predicting the possible reasons of his death in the “bad water” (Thuy 146). It is assumed that he might have slipped while jumping from one boat to the water and the water might have dragged him. However, the narrator knew that her brother was stubborn and that he would fight his way out. She desperately wished for her brother to return despite knowing that the water might have swallowed him. Despite years after his death, the memories of the dead brother continue to haunt her. She dwells in an imaginary world where her brother is right next to her. She writes, “when I stopped looking for my brother, I feel that he was right beside me, so close that I couldnot see him” (Thuy 148). Vietnam, evokes in her the memories of her deceased brother. When she left for America, she felt as if she left her brother behind. She left a share of her memories behind which in turn made her displacement more tormenting.

Apart from collective memory, individual trauma which is significant to the understanding of the post war experiences is associated with larger historical and social factors. Both the novels magnify the crucial Vietnam War and evoke its gruesome memories through its traumatic recollections in the aftermath. The traumatized characters in the novel foreground the specificity of individual trauma and speak on the behalf of the hundreds of the destitute refugees. Their present traumatic experiences are associated with the larger social factors referring to a group of people who have collectively experienced massive trauma. The unspeakability of trauma is manifested through incoherent speech, nightmares, horrific flashbacks which trigger abnormal activities in the person.

It is noteworthy that, this experience of trauma, arising out of socio historical factors, can also be termed as “cultural trauma” in Jeffrey Alexander’s words (Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* 6). Cultural trauma leaves ineffaceable marks upon the group consciousness of a group of people who have been subjected to a ghastly event in the past. The Vietnam War stands as a

symbol for human suffering and the evil. Though viewed as a collective experience, there might exist individual variations in the interpretations of the event.

It must be acknowledged that though there exist normative interpretations of common occurrences like war, there might be also novel and varying interpretations of the same event. Both the novels selected speak of collective suffering and traumatic displacement. By presenting the narration through child narrators, the authors present a less tangled and intimate understanding of war that differs from the perception of the adults. It is noticed that both the child narrators foreground the seemingly unimportant activities of their daily life with much intensity. This unveils the traces of trauma that they experienced in their daily life. By presenting the experience of trauma through the simplest of the daily activities, the authors highlight the all pervasive nature of trauma.

Photographs also play a pivotal role in this recollection of memories. From the very beginning of the narrative, photographs are depicted as a significant mode through which remembrance operates. Photographs capture the moment and freeze it. Emblematic of a lost time, place and people, photographs turn to a source of reliving memories in the new world. It captures us as the happiest, weirdest or the most real. The moment captured by the photograph seizes the observers to the core which years later, allows them to relive the moment. Through its easy accessibility, photographs hold the power of evoking the deepest memories. It has the power of traveling across time and space, thus reproducing an event or a moment of the past with the same intensity. The author states that, photographs remind us of our past including our clothes and the exact physical features. The black and white photograph of the author's grandparents sitting in the porch of their house reminds her of Vietnam and their happier times. The photograph of her grandparents always reminded her of a beginning. The photograph, in Marriane Hirsch's words provide access to the past, to feel and relive it. The earliest memory of the narrator of her father is of her father's frame coiled by a bristly wire of a military camp in Vietnam. The photograph provides her access to her father's dispositions. His expression in the photograph gives off an impression of his iron will. Photographs as discussed earlier, are also an important source of memory. The author notes that the earliest memories of her father was always of leaving. As he was in the South Vietnamese army, he was always stationed in or outside the country. Her mother too derived questions of her father's wellbeing by observing the child from one angle to the other.

The effects of the War including the pathetic displacement stays alive in the mind of the narrator. She could recollect the moments when they escaped during darkness in boats filled with people. In America, the memories of Vietnam did not leave her. Very often she would sleep on roof tops or on lawns, surrounded by knots of memories, which according to her, had no language to unravel. The author, through this highlights the unspeakability of the past traumatic memories the failure of reconciliation with the disturbed past. The author exposes the vulnerability of the father, when he pleaded for help from his daughter to help him overcome the tormenting memories of the past. The narrator felt helpless, for she knew, she had no language to console him. Such was the intensity of the trauma. Having served the Vietnamese army, her father experienced the violence of war from a close distance which, later took a toll on his mental health. He remembered the dead bodies that floated through the paddy field. He wondered what happened to the badly buried bodies. The slightest of events remind him of the past brutal death including a bright green field that was shown in the television.

Apart from the traumatic experiences, racial segregation and exclusionism also underlies her narrative. Similar to Ha, the child narrator in Thuy's novel is the only Vietnamese in her school. Her teacher introduces her place of belonging through a globe to which the other students would react with astonishment. This initial description of her experiences at school throws light at Ha being treated as the "other", someone belonging to a place which is unknown to the others. Her effort to calm herself through meditations at school fails because she is constantly reminded of the memories of her dead brother. Such intense was her trauma that she admits her inability to sleep properly after the death of her brother. At the house of Mr Russell, she befriends some glass animals which were kept carefully in Melvin's office. She spoke to the glass animals about their tragic displacement with people in boats clinging against each other trying to reach out to the helping hands in hope for sponsorship.

Surviving through her traumatic childhood, the narrator while growing up, foregrounds her desire of reconciling with her family's traumatic past, in a different manner than her father. She fears at the possibility of being like her father and runs away in hope to be different from him.

Thus, the authors present different responses towards the trauma caused by the Vietnam War. Ha in *Inside Out and Back Again*, undergoes cultural trauma, being a part of the large refugee exodus. The shared effort to discern the causes of suffering is a distinctive feature of

cultural trauma. The collective memory, in her case, is the repository of cultural trauma. It acts as a living force in the life of the individuals. According to Ron Eyerman, cultural trauma moulds the perception of the individuals and the groups about themselves, thus orienting their understanding of their Selves and their existence. The trauma in question, here, is the aftermath of the Vietnam War including the period of exodus and is significant to the collective memory of the Vietnamese people. This collective memory of the War shapes the process of identity formation. Her individual memory of the war is an aspect of the collective memory shared by thousands of refugees. This collective memory depends on the social frameworks which ultimately is crucial in shaping the identity of the person. As the novel progresses, the author focuses on Ha's growth of self. Her journey from the grief of separation from Vietnam to her struggle with her new life and finally her adaptation of the life foregrounds Ha's evolving self. Ha's self was in constant state of change and reformation. It can be argued that the title of the novel reflects the journey of Ha and her family. The tragic displacement led them to embark on a topsy turvy ride of life. However, with time, their gradual adjustment to Alabama, it seems that they achieved a certain degree of stability. Tormented at the separation from Vietnam, Ha gradually overcame all the racial hatred and stepped towards acceptance of change and adaptation to the new life.

Remembrance of the war, both individually and collectively plays a crucial role in shaping their Diaspora selves. Home for them has shrunk into a metaphor of belonging. Time and again, both the characters display nostalgia for their homeland. Their memory of their homeland is rooted in people, photographs, gestures and objects. Bonded to their homeland through their memories, the characters also display efforts at assimilating into the new culture. At times, their memories, specially the traumatic ones hinder their process of assimilation. Straddling two worlds, with a sense of longing and belonging, most of the child survivors never knew their parents. Holding memories of families torn apart by war, they grew up as discarded human beings and as an object of despite in the New World. In less settled times, like war, memory plays a pivotal role in constructing one's identity. Crucial events, like the war, results in shared experiences, which are collective in nature and are recollected later by the survivors.

It is noteworthy that the collective memories of trauma are mediated through the individuals in their own ways. Their remembrance of war differs. For Ha, Vietnam War led to her separation with her beloved papaya tree and for the child narrator in the second novel, Vietnam

epitomizes the memories of her dead brother. While Ha deals with nostalgia, the child narrator engages with the traumatic memories of her dead brother.

All the characters in the novel undergo dual marginalization of being a refugee and an Asian. The very term “refugee” hints at the tragic aspect of their identity. However, it is noteworthy that, the term “refugee” should not obliterate their previous identity or their future probable identities. The category of being a “refugee” is not permanently fixed and hence upholds possibilities of transformations. Their tragic process of displacement as refugees and eventual reconciliation with their existence in the host country marks their evolving formation of Diaspora self. While Ha struggling with her childhood memories moves towards reconciliation and adaptation, the nameless narrator of *Gangster* makes an effort to come in terms with her tragic memories. In both the novels, memory acts as a driving force of a major part of the story. Memories, in both the novels can be perceived as bridging the gap between the past and the present and offers a transhistorical experience to the war survivors. The Diaspora self of the war survivors is to a large extent shaped by the memories and the socio cultural environment.

Both the protagonists fought a double edged battle of negotiating with their refugee status as well as carving for themselves a niche in the newly found social world. However their manner of remembrance of the past is crucial in the formation of the self in the present. Thuy’s characters’ remembrance is characterized by intense trauma and thus trauma is crucial to the formation of her Diaspora self. Trauma, for them, shaped their understanding of their present state in the light of the past events. It shaped their formation of self as war survivors. Her Diaspora self is characterized by trauma as well as an effort of reconciliation with the past. The effects of the Vietnam War are so deeply rooted in their memories that Vietnam for them, is more about the traumatic memories rather than a country. From being Asians to being Asian Americans, the protagonists undergo fundamental changes in their identity and their perception of self. For both the child survivors, their process of growing up to be American is not a simple one. Experiencing conflicting pressure of assimilation and ethnic loyalty further aggravated by individual traumatic memories, the child survivors’ journey of a safe heaven is arduous. Their Diaspora selves are characterized by memories: both nostalgic and traumatic, an effort of reconciliation with the past as well as there exist traces of assimilation into the new culture. Both of them are struggling to find a home for themselves in the New World, which for them emanates a feeling of belonging rather than being restricted to a concrete space.

Both the protagonists epitomize the thousands of refugees who are struggling to create their identity in the New World, thus evoking Thanhha Lai's words in the preface-

"To the million of refugees in the world, May you each find a home".

- (Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*)

Chapter IV

Architecture of the Autobiographical Self

“Anger can teach us forgiveness, hate can teach us love, and war can teach us peace.”

(Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* xv)

This chapter aims to delineate the nature and the formation of the autobiographical self in Le Ly Hayslip’s memoir *Child of War, Women of Peace*. The chapter explores the efforts of a women writer in documenting and voicing out her views on the historic Vietnam War. Being a survivor of the Vietnam War, Hayslip captures her traumatic memories of the war in the memoir *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989), a prequel to *Child of War, Women of Peace* (1993). Apart from drawing on the political history of war, Hayslip foregrounds an emotional history of war and initiates a journey of healing and reconciliation with her past. This journey towards a new Self is fulfilled in the sequel where she starts her journey in the New World as an immigrant. The chapter, thus is an attempt to delve deep into her evolution and the transformation of her Self. The title of the chapter “Architecture of the Autobiographical Self” foregrounds the attributes and the process of formation and the evolution of her Self. The term “autobiographical” highlights the nature of the narrative, the agent of the narrative being the survivor herself. The writer being the survivor shall foreground questions of authenticity and the degree of intensity of the events. The way the event is remembered and expressed shall determine the intensity and the significance of it in the life of the survivor. Writing for Le Ly, turns out to be a cathartic process, which in a way helps her to come in terms with the trauma and the loss she underwent. The chapter shall also foreground Hayslip’s attempt to present a version of the Vietnam War from the perspective of the survivors which includes the poor peasantry class of Vietnamese people. Hayslip’s works are thus a microcosmic reflection of the life of the thousands of refugees and shall raise serious concern of understanding of one’s Self amidst the conflict and in the post conflict situation. Judith Herman’s steps of recovery analyzed in the book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) shall be referred to while elucidating Hayslip’s journey of recovery

and healing.

The category of victim created by war is crucial in comprehending their relation with the New World. The Vietnam War, being one of the most gruesome war led to the emergence of the figure of victim prominently. Le Ly Hayslip is one of the victims that emerged from the Vietnam War whose tales of victimization and suffering have been recorded intricately in the two memoirs. She represents herself as the emblematic victim which is associated with her status of being a Vietnamese, an immigrant and a women on a personal level. Representing herself as the victimized figure, Hayslip criticizes the hegemonic masculinity. Through her personal narrative, Hayslip, apart from symbolically bearing the collective pain and trauma also advocates the need for forgiveness for self healing. Hayslip, through her narrative, challenges the entire normative notion of a “victim”. Generally perceived, a victim is considered to be the sufferer or the prey who is voiceless and powerless. Hayslip’s life entails her journey of initially being a “victim”, who later rose to power and embarked on a journey of self discovery and healing. Hayslip, being the victim, as people would view her, renders herself a voice and positions herself in a crucial position of political and entrepreneurial dealings. She finds herself situated between America and Vietnam, a Vietnamese daughter and an American wife and most significantly between war and peace. She tries to figure a centre point where the seemingly opposite forces can meet. Hayslip is constantly reminded of her deceased father’s words and his visions that guide her throughout her journey of self discovery. According to Viet Thanh Nguyen, Hayslip ventures on a journey of reconciliation not only of the East and the West but also to reconcile herself to other overseas Vietnamese who perceive her as whore, traitor, and self-promoter.

Throughout her first memoir she foregrounds her lack of proper formal education which is repeated in the second memoir with her need for a translator to English every time she narrates her story. Her work doesnot adhere to any normative standard of writing. Her spontaneous manner of expression adds to the authenticity of her feelings thus lending more credence to the traumatic phases of her life. The readers are directly associated with her life through the narrative which holds the power of reproducing the feelings that Hayslip went through. She foregrounds the significance of writing in the production of self and a collective consciousness. Time and again, Hayslip reiterates that the memoirs are for audiences of both the sides, to read, feel and realize the truth which often have been effaced. This might lead to the formation

of a new collective consciousness of the past which earlier did not exist.

War has always been a dominant universal theme which existed since ages. The literature of war has existed in all the dominant cultures including Greek and Roman culture. Homer's *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* foregrounds historic war narratives as does Virgil's *The Aeneid*. These literary works that spans over centuries reiterates the fact that war is a socio political force that exists in a society, affecting the social fabric in intense and sometimes irreparable ways. Further, the proliferation of recent scholarship on war reinstates war to be a contemporary significant issue. Differing in time and space, there always existed war in different forms thus posing variegated threats to mankind. It is noteworthy that, the literature of war entails different approaches in comprehending experiences of war. Shared memories of war finds expression through literature. From war poetry, war fiction to memoirs, autobiographies and journal entries narrating personal war experiences, war narratives developed into a crucial field of study over time. It is crucial to foreground the role of literature in the after math of war or the political conflicts. Question arises regarding the role that literature plays in comprehending the complexities of war and the difficulties as well as possibilities of reconciliation. Literature including memoirs provide significant outlets of the traumatic war experiences and are therapeutic at times. They foreground the significance and role of narrative art in making sense of the past chaotic society in the present time. When war is over, literature can help us in making sense of it and thus shape our understanding of the past.

The genre of Hayslip's war narratives, memoir is crucial to the comprehension of her personal experiences. The French word memoir, meaning reminiscence refers to important events, both personal and private that occurred in the life of the writer. Though the two terms are used interchangeably, a thin line of difference exists between an autobiography and a memoir. A memoir reflects on and explores the emotions of a past experience unlike autobiographies which focuses on the documentation of the facts. Memoirs like, autobiographies offer access to personal emotions and experiences. Unlike recording one's entire life like autobiographies, a memoir focuses on some specific events of one's life. Unlike autobiography, memoir might not be chronological in nature. A rupture in the timeline is seen in order to foreground particular significant occurrences in the life of the writer. Both the genres share the attributes of recording the past. However, a memoir, moves beyond the mere documentation of the past and attempts to re-create the past with proper analysis of the occurrences.

Sharing many attributes with autobiographies, memoir is usually considered to be a subcategory of an autobiography. Memoir singles out one specific event from the life of author whereas an autobiography records the story of a life. The self turns out to be the centre of one's memoir. However, the degree of authenticity in expression of one's experiences is contested. As mentioned by Qi Wang, in the book, *The Autobiographical Self in Time and Culture* (2013), the Western literary standards characterizes an autobiography as an inward reflection of one's life rather than being a mere record of the external circumstances. It is a deeply retrospective account along with personal interpretations of the past event. Similar to other literary genres, autobiography foreground circumstances of life, the spatial and temporal factors that affects those circumstances. Conditioned by one's perception of self, autobiography documents one's past experiences through the lens of the present self. The genesis of autobiography lies in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which was written as a testimony to God reflecting on a series of personal experiences. Based on memory and interpretation, rather than mere recounting of facts, St. Augustine attempts at the creation of a coherent understanding of his life and his moral self. This sets the ground for a model of Christian self which derives the power from God. This model of self was characterized by self reflection, complexity and inner virtue. With emphasis on inner virtue, this Christian notion of self derives its meaning by relating to God. Later, in the medieval era, with the ushering of Italian Renaissance, the individual's conception of the self gained prominence. This modern notion of the inner self which emerges from within the person became the thrust of autobiographies. The writers record the intricate details of their intimate feelings and past experiences thus emphasizing diversity. This notion of inner self led to the celebration of individuality and diversity through autobiographical works. With the beginning of the Romantic period, personality as a central aspect of self gained significance and thus personal distinctiveness gained prominence. Gradually, autobiography turned to a significant account of insights into selfhood. Autobiographies might reveal many insecurities and truths and also traces the journey of identity formation. Qi Wang mentioned that, "The task for the autobiographer is thus to relate a life as experienced—a life with meaning" (Wang 43). Self, being the focus of an autobiography foregrounds the most intimate emotions and experiences of the author. The degree of indepth analysis and personal revelation is a crucial parameter for accessing the quality of an autobiography. A key element of autobiography is subjectivity. Through the autobiographical act

of writing his self, an individual renders meaning to his own life. However, the degree of accuracy of representation is contested. This act of writing involves the depiction of one's life, the interpretations and the discoveries.

In the autobiography, the self turns out to be the protagonist and memory acts as the primary source for autobiographies. According to Qi Wang, the autobiographical self begins at "the time of birth" and comprises the reflection on one's own self (Wang, *When does our Autobiographical Self Begin?* 97). The autobiographical self relies upon what William Brewer defines as "re collective memory" (Brewer, *Remembering Our Past* 20). Autobiographical memory, which is the memory of one's own life, forms the foundation of the autobiographical self. According to Robert Fivush and Catherine Haden, an individual's fashioning of a life narrative and the understanding of his Self are partially shaped by the larger cultural framework (Fivush and Haden, *Autobiographical Memory and the construction of a Narrative Self* 8). Autobiographical memory is constituted by the personal memories of one's life events and in doing so, generates a sense of personal history that differs between individuals. Socio cultural and historical factors, within the ambit of which an individual grew are instrumental in the construction of autobiographies. According to Robert Fivush, without the "cultural frame of time, place and social structure", individuals lack social history as well as context (Fivush and Haden 8). Taking into consideration, this larger perspective of autobiographical self, the individual's personal narrative and their interpretations add to the diversity in autobiographical narrations. The interpretations of the past experiences add to the significance of the present existence of the individuals. Memoirs, being a subcategory of autobiography adheres to all the above discussed characteristics. Memoirs, in a way, reflect the ways in which the authors view and perceive the world. Instead of being mere presentation of facts, memoirs help to understand the past and connect it to the present. Memoir also propounds an individual's thoughts on the proper workings of a society and is particularly significant in delving deep into the emotional history of war .

Reminiscing is a crucial aspect of autobiographical memories. Autobiographical memory is inextricably associated with the notions of self and identity. Remembering is crucial to the process of constructing memories. At times, the autobiographical memory is interrelated with socio historical memory when public events enter the fabric of the personal life. Thus, the process of remembering is inherently an individual act embedded in the social fabric.

Hayslip's two works, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989) and *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993) are accounts of her experiences in war torn Vietnam and later in America. Hayslip, through her works, aims at the reconciliation of the opposite forces: the Vietnamese and the Americans. Meditating on the sacrifices one must make to survive in a war torn country, Hayslip holds on to the belief that war can teach peace.

The critically acclaimed work, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, narrates her experiences during the war and her return in 1986 to Vietnam. Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* present the readers with a war narrative through the lens of the Vietnamese civilians, the peasants who survived the horrors of the war. For the initial twelve years of her life, Hayslip spent her life as a peasant girl of her village Ky La imbibing in her all the teachings of her parents including respect for the ancestors and love for her native land. Humility and the strength of virtue helped her sail through the toughest voyages. For three years, she struggled and served Viet Cong against American and South Vietnamese soldiers. Her notions of the war were shaped by the North Vietnamese soldiers. She learnt to view Vietnam as a country whose people holds the power of decisions and no outside force should be allowed the power to divide the nation. For the Vietcong and Hayslip, freedom meant a Vietnam free of colonial domination which holds the power of determining its own destiny. Happiness, for them meant plenty of food and an end to the war. Time and again, Hayslip foregrounds the strong belief of the Vietnamese on the spirits of their ancestors. According to Hayslip, the younger generation felt the demand of their ancestral spirits to resist the outside forces and their brutality including the terror caused by the Japanese invaders. They believed that the souls of their ancestors who were mercilessly killed demanded revenge against the invaders. The war, according to Hayslip began as an "insatiable dragon" that swallowed the people, thus turning a life of peace to a mere hazy dream for them (Hayslip 14). The poor people were caught between their allegiance to the allied forces and also to the Viet Cong. Caught in the middle, these people "were what the war was all about" (Hayslip 15). The motives of the Viet Cong were similar to that of the villagers rather than those of the South, and therefore they identified themselves with the Vietcong more often. However, the villagers fought for both the sides including Hayslip's own brothers who were divided between the North and the South. However, with time,

Le Ly learns the horrific truth of the extremity of the Viet Cong when she was raped and then was exiled from the village. She leaves Ky La and moves to Saigon for sustenance while her father stays back to look after the land of their ancestors. A series of events occurred when Hayslip was impregnated by her master, Anh for which she was disowned by her father and later moved to Danang. Later on she gets into a series of relationships with American men and worked in Bars and hospitals. Deeply disillusioned by war, Hayslip's father, Trong committed suicide. Hayslip's brothers including Bon Nghe and Huyen suspected her activities. Hayslip met Ed Munro, an elderly American contractor and eventually married him which further aggravated her differences with her family. Gratified with his kindness and lured by a promising and peaceful life in the United States, Le Ly leaves her homeland, not knowing if she will ever return. Towards the end of the first book, Hayslip describes the final moment when she finally sets off for America with her husband. In the aircraft that they boarded, she could only see the bright aura of the humanity around her. Her lines, "Oriental and Occidental commingles and indistinguishable -- bathes the walls in golden light", hints at her desire of the reconciliation of the contradicting forces where differences between the East and the West would no longer exist (Hayslip 361). In her final journey to America, her village Ky La flashed before her eyes and then vanished into a memory. Of the many traumas that Hayslip recounts entails the complexities of her relationships. After losing her brother when he joins the North, she lost her brother Sau Ban. Further her sister Ba is forced to marry a republican policeman against her nationalistic ideologies. She further suffered after the death of her fiancé Anh and losses all hope of a married life after being raped. After suffering from multiple traumas, she embarks on a journey for the search of a healing relationship which later materializes when she begins her life in America.

Le Ly Hayslip's memoir *Child of War and Women of Peace*, a sequel of the above discussed memoir is the centre of discussion in this chapter. The memoir traces Hayslip's journey to America and her experiences in the alien land. Experiencing all the atrocities, Hayslip fled to Danang, then to Saigon, where she worked as a maid, waitress, and hospital worker. After the birth of her first son, she met Ed Munro, an American GI and married him and finally moved

to America. However, with Munro's death, Hayslip remarried her next husband, a physically abusive man who died leaving Hayslip to care for her three sons. Later, Hayslip eventually returned to Vietnam in 1986 to visit her family. Her trip inspired her to create the East Meets West Foundation in 1988, a humanitarian relief organization that focused on providing relief to Vietnam and offering comfort to American veterans. An understanding of the aftermaths of the Vietnam War have been significantly shaped by her works.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge Hayslip's efforts of foregrounding the experiences and the outlook of the common Vietnamese people on the Vietnam War which, otherwise, is dominated by the experiences of the Americans. Hayslip, in the works shifted the focus of the war narrative and foregrounds her story of growing up in the bleak shadow of the war. From her tale of being an innocent peasant girl and her nightmarish memories of French and Moroccan soldiers to her loyalties to the Vietcong and later being raped, Hayslip's narrative is one of brutal reality foregrounding the experiences of the Vietnamese war survivors. Presenting a searing account of the War, Hayslip paints an intimate picture of tales of survival. She throws light on the suffering that war causes which often go unnoticed including the loss of a loved ones, the loss of health and youth. She foregrounds the special nature of suffering where people suffer in peace as well as in war. Foregrounding the special nature of suffering, Hayslip dwells on how to be wise amidst the confusion, brave and strong when people turn weak. She firmly believes that anger can teach forgiveness, hate can teach us love and war holds the power of teaching peace. This first book, thus initiates her life as an immigrant in America and her journey from understanding war to preaching peace. Hayslip, through her memoirs recreate her past and presents an insight to the inner world of the war survivor, which was overlooked in the American narratives of the Vietnam War. This effort of Hayslip can be interpreted in accordance to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's thoughts that, discursive categories which are sites of political contestations should be grounded in and informed by the daily life struggle for survival of poor people which are generally not included in the history (Mohanty et l., *Third World Women and Politics of Feminism* 11). Hayslip doesnot only foreground the American dream of success but also the daily life struggle of a war survivor which is generally written out of history.

It is noteworthy that, that while retrieving memories of the past, the writers might adopt a medium which might involve a degree of fictionality. According to Paul Auster, the American

writer, an autobiography involves a dialogue with memory and is inseparable (Gudmundsdottir, *Borderlines* 11). The process of remembering is as crucial as the memories and at times blur the distinction between the past and the present. Memoirs do not always involve a smooth process of remembering and therefore, gaps or fissures might be foregrounded which raises question on the power of retention. These gaps lead to the concept of forgetting which is as crucial as the process of remembering. This in turn, provides space to the readers for imaginative reconstruction of the past. Memory is always an outcome of circumstances, experience, connections and the changing perspective of the remembering self.

Time is crucial to autobiographies and autobiographical memory. The memories represent a past reality in a continuous manner and at times lack the temporal organization. Autobiographies are guided by the need to remember, forget and narrate what is remembered. Writing an autobiography entails choosing some memories and discarding others. Thus, narrative plays a crucial role in this entire process of remembering. Unlike in autobiography, a memoir might not engage in a coherent process of remembering. Memory, a product of the circumstances entail experiences, both personal and public as well as foreground connections to people and unveils a gradual change in the self which is remembered by an individual. A significant concern of the memoir is the Hayslip's response to the loss. In the first book, she portrayed herself as a duty bound Vietnamese daughter and in the sequel, she positions herself as an independent being who embarks on a journey of healing and critiques all the power structures including racism, capitalism, sexism, hegemonic masculinity.

The memoir opens with an emphasis on remembering the lives lost. At the very outset, Hayslip evokes the heart wrenching aftermath of war which includes people abandoning their village. Death in war or heart wrenching struggle of survival seems to be the fate of the people who were the victims of the war. It begins with a soldier visiting his village in South Vietnam after the war. Both fauna and flora were transformed to mere vestiges. Only a Sau Dau tree stood alone on a river bank which reminded him of the world he knew. In the village, which transformed into a graveyard, the soldier surprisingly met an Old women. Hayslip through their conversations, further evokes the brutality of war including the rape of a girl who sang on the ferries.

The Sau Dau tree epitomizes the happier times which at present turned to a distant dream for the soldier. Hayslip mentions that the people away from home can feel a sense of belongingness through the Sau Dau tree and its song. She suggests that the song of the Sau Dau tree heals the Vietnamese refugees who are far away from their motherland. For Hayslip, the meaning of home entails "the soil underfoot, wherever it is", thus arousing an anticipation of togetherness in the mind of the readers (Hayslip 3). Unveiling the horrors of the war through the intense emotions of the soldier, Hayslip moves on to provide her own experiences of 1970 when she landed in America. At the young age of twenty years with two sons from different father, Hayslip landed in America. She knew very little English and her mannerisms, according to her were better suited to her peasant life. Perplexed and bewildered, she reached San Diego, her new home.

Time and again, the narrative foregrounds the inevitable cultural clashes that occur during her stay in America. Her story begins in the land of the enemies and her struggle to survive in the eyes of the "cat eyed" westerners. In the prologue of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, Hayslip hints the readers at her desire for reconciliation between the East and the West as she claims that it "is the story of discovering treasure where you least expect it; of searching for two halves that make a perfect whole" (Hayslip 10).

Hayslip's journey from war to peace also entails her personal journey from a victim to a healer. Her relationships with the American men is crucial to understand her development of a sense of self and identity. Hayslip had an affair with Dan, an American army officer while being married to Ed Munro. After Ed's death, she married Dennis only to discover later that he was abusive and unstable. His accidental death liberated her from the abusive relation but ended up reuniting with Dan which proved to be disastrous. Some particular aspects of these trail of relationships when discussed in detail shall unveil her evolution and formation of her self. The author's deep Buddhist faith proved to be a great source of strength and a constant solace as Hayslip, despite her unwavering energy, courage, and optimism, proved often dangerously naive in her love and business affairs. To understand, Hayslip's formation and evolution of her self, it is crucial to understand her relationships, her effort and challenges in assimilating into the American culture as well as her spiritual inclinations and beliefs.

In the first part titled, "Living with the Enemy", she chronicles her experiences of struggling to survive in the foreign land. In the beginning section, "yearning to breathe free", she

mentions being at peace for the first time after gulping in the air of a peaceful world after stepping out of the Honolulu international airport. Hayslip married Ed Munro, a middle aged American civilian construction engineer with the desperate hope of securing her future and saving her children from war. She recounts her initial experience at Ed's home where his sister was too quick to express her affection with no emotion. She was amazed at the immediate display of affection by the American family. It is noteworthy that, Hayslip, through out the work engages in a comparison between the American way of life and the Confucian values. She adorned the house with spiritual posters and Buddha statues. Instead of European books, there were volumes on Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other oriental books on astrology. She also draws a contrast with her American neighbors by drawing on the hardships she survived through.

Her relationships with the American men are instrumental in foregrounding the contrast between the American and Vietnamese ways of being and ideals. She alludes to domestic violence as "atrocities" and thus employs the language of warfare very often. According to the dictionary, atrocity is committed upon a body which is unable to defend itself. Viet Thanh Nguyen, in a critical commentary on Hayslip upholds that, she locates atrocity in the American home, through Dennis, her second husband and thus brings the war home by evoking in the readers the atrocities of the Vietnam War. Dennis, for Hayslip, turns out to be the perpetrator of atrocity with his obsession of guns, motorcycles and alcohol. She foregrounds the domestic setting in America which brings in challenges for the immigrant Asian wife thus debunking the notion of the sudden achievement of the Great American Dream. Hayslip depicts her body as the site on which atrocities were inflicted which brings forth the glaring racial and gender differences. The same body that suffered the atrocities shall also be instrumental in her aim of reconciliation. Hayslip addresses both the American and Vietnamese audience and serves as a symbol of connection between the two. Her relationship with Ed failed to provide her with the sense of peace and security that she was longing for. On one occasion, she writes to her sister Lan, "Don't be in a hurry to sacrifice your freedom...Don't marry a GI " (Hayslip 37). She warns her sisters against the probable atrocities she might face if married to an army men who survived the Vietnam War.

Despite the differences between the two nations, Hayslip's narrative attempts to establish a connection between the two with a positive implication of togetherness and peace. Thus, her depiction of her victim body also leads to the reconciliation of the Vietnamese tradition and the American self. Her account of her life is a crucial act of witnessing, remembering and then

writing.

Ed's relatives and friends ignore Le Ly's presence and consider her to be a "spoiled cry baby" because she cries while watching news report from Vietnam (Hayslip 26). Hayslip foregrounds the impassive attitude of Ed's family members to the ruthless killings in Vietnam. The America's perception of Vietnam disappoints Hayslip. Hayslip's remembrance of Vietnam is dismissed as mere "homesickness" by her new American family. "In a land of instant gratification and miracle conveniences, apparently, there was no room for a spontaneous show of love through the labor of one's heart and hands", she writes (Hayslip 26). She remembers Vietnam in all its compassion and beauty rather than the brutalities of war. Sitting in Leatha's yard at sunset, Hayslip stares at the palm trees which do not have the magical effect of the Sau Dau trees. Further, while introducing Vietnam to his family, Ed narrates everything except the bloody and dark past of Le Ly which foregrounds his voluntary disregard of the painful history of the Vietnam War, thus portraying his partial understanding of Vietnam. Here, comes in the significance of her memoirs. Hayslip mentions that the Americans were unknown to the effects of war on the poor people. The aim of her memoirs, thus, is to foreground the other side of the war which might initiate compassion of the Americans towards the Vietnamese people. Hayslip always wished to enlighten the ignorant people about the truth of the war, the poor Vietnamese people trapped in the war but she "didn't know the words, even in Vietnamese" (Hayslip 27). The burning up of the native land which was telecasted in the television always evoked in her feelings of nostalgia for her native land.

Hayslip gradually understands that rather than the reversal of role in America, one's individual self holds more significance. In contrast to the eastern values of a family life of togetherness, Hayslip foregrounds the significance of individuality in the lives of the Americans. She considers Ed's mother staying alone to be strange and ponders upon essence and reason of happiness for the Americans. She fails to comprehend the meaning of freedom in America and was exposed to the American way of life which contradicts her Vietnamese ideals.

Every little thing of America, including the huge two door refrigerator and the festival of Christmas leaves Hayslip dumfounded. Even her visit to the market was full of surprises. Ed almost choked when she got ready to go shopping in her black pajamas like that in Vietnam. There, she was introduced to the western way of dressing, which she felt to be too inappropriate.

American market, further surprises her through the canned, packaged and wrapped food which are hidden in boxes. With her inability to connect to the Christmas experience, her homesickness overpowers her and she tells Ed that she must return to Vietnam. Since her marriage to Ed did not bring her healing or peace, she gradually realizes that happiness is not associated to a place, let alone it be the Promised Land. It is a state of mind that owes much more to the inner world of an individual rather than the external world.

The first few days in California was described by her as “pure hell” (Hayslip 87). Ed’s company did not provide her comfort but instead made her terribly guilty and sick. Besides her traumatic past, she suffers emotionally in California. Ed’s attitude towards Hayslip degrades, when he discovers Dan’s letters for Hayslip thus further jeopardizing their marital relation and the least possible hope of reconciliation. When Ed falls sick, he discovers Dan’s letters for Hayslip. She met Dan in Vietnam, an army major and believes to have found the perfect connection. The letters were received by Ed who did not allow Hayslip to read them. Hayslip in a way, through her helplessness, foregrounds the powerless state of an immigrant women and Ed’s assertion of right over her. She fails to assert her right to the letters and helplessly watches him read the letters to himself ultimately causing pain to himself and Hayslip. She writes, “I realized he was torturing himself to death, and torturing me by making me watch” (Hayslip 91). With Ed, Hayslip undergoes emotionally traumatic moments. She connects the pain of Ed reading Dan’s letter to her father’s death which bears similarity to her father’s emotional disintegration brought by war. With Ed’s death, she struggles with guilt and struggles to support her boys by engaging herself in tasks like housecleaning.

Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and Hayslip’s effort to restore that power can be seen as an initial step into recovery. After Ed’s death, a sense of empowerment is instilled into Hayslip and she paves her path of healing herself by being independent and helping herself. Gradually, she steps into a new world when a job was offered by a woman at National semiconductor company. When she arrived in America with Ed, she always desired for her independent source of living. With her increase in fortune, she bought her own house. Finally, after owning her own house, she felt a bit accomplished and wrote, “This was the America we had dreamed about in Vietnam” (Hayslip 158). She yearned for America as a place that would give her a sense of ownership, security and liberty. Eventually, she could find herself moving towards her aspirations.

Dan's visit for a few days made Le Ly further perplexed as he informed that he was married which she refers as "the bombshell finally hit" (Hayslip 103). Meanwhile, Ed's family convinces her to get involved with Dennis which will be the further cause of her trauma. Hayslip, through her next husband, Dennis, foregrounds the differences in religion and an American's conception of Buddhism. Dennis refers to Buddha as the "devil" and rebukes her worshiping an idol and advises her to adopt Christianity. In their conversations, constantly occur the differences between Asian countries and American nations. For Hayslip, faith was no longer a relief because the Baptist and Catholic sponsors demanded that all Vietnamese refugees, including Buddhists, join their church. This prompted local Buddhists to react strongly to avoid conversions thereby paving the path for the re-emergence of the old wars of religion on the American soil. Buddhist values including forgiveness and compassion turns out to be her sources of healing which can heal individuals and communities. Throughout the memoir, Hayslip foregrounds the significance of these values and draws a difference with the western values. Through Dennis, she foregrounds the attitude of the Americans towards the Boat people. On one occasion, Dennis grunted. "You Vietnamese really stick together, don't you? Still taking advantage of the Americans! Whose side are you on now, anyway?" (Hayslip 117). He was cautious of all the boat people and considered them as a threat to their livelihood. Dennis considered the boat people as opportunistic and many a times threatened Hayslip with a gun, which supposedly was the "American" way, according to the doctor. The Korean War veteran, regards the boat people as a prime cause of a rising economic insecurity in the States. He insisted Hayslip to undergo Bible education which did not assist her spiritually. Instead, she spent more time with the Buddhist monks, who, seems to be the only people to understand her. She confesses that her attempts at socializing "the American way" failed miserable initially.

Hayslip's relation with Dennis was never peaceful and satisfying. Hayslip critiques his hegemonic masculinity and his association with guns and other things of warfare. Owing to her mental condition, Hayslip consulted an American doctor who attributed her disturbed mental state to her origin. The doctor stated, "Guns are a part of his life. You come from Vietnam. It's natural for you to be afraid of them" (Hayslip 124).

While with Dennis, Hayslip positions herself as a victim of the American materialism and hegemonic masculinity. Dennis's hatred for the refugees, particularly the boat people

paints a derogatory picture of the Vietnamese migrants from the perspective of the Americans. She is portrayed as the weak, subdued and voiceless counterpart succumbing to the overpowering male. Hayslip's life with Dennis recreates the life-threatening conditions of war. In the chapter titled, "GUNS AND MEN!" she recounts her gradual entrapment by Dennis in a dangerous and in another traumatic marriage. Le Ly is especially vulnerable because there is no social support against aggressive, violent men thus further unveiling the predicament of immigrant women. On one occasion, Dennis visits Vietnam and saves Le Ly's sister, Lan and forces Le Ly to marry him as a token of gratitude. Problems in her marital life gradually unfold when Dennis begins collecting guns, buying more motorcycles and turns to an alcohol addict. He turns the American home to a warfare zone with his guns which Hayslip compares with American fighter planes that hovered over her village during the Vietnam War. Dennis's behavior turns to be traumatic for Hayslip and reminds her of the atrocities committed by French, Koreans and Americans against Vietnamese villagers. However, with Dennis's death, she gradually climbs the ladder of success and also gains financial independence, owning three houses and a share of a restaurant. Slowly she becomes a part of the first world, which she was earlier deprived of.

After Dennis's unexpected death, Hayslip reunited with Dan which further brought challenges to her life. Dennis's death, according to her, brought for her feelings of sadness and euphoria. She felt a burden to be lifted and experienced a joy that transcends death. She believes that letting go shall enable to reach for more. A strong sense of positivity, a transformation and a desire to move ahead stronger can be felt when she writes, "Like the little hand that grasped mine by Dennis's grave on that cold Ohio day, I knew that transformation would one day result in something strong and grand and wonderful" (Hayslip 143). After the death of Dennis, Hayslip expresses her strong urge to go back home and reconnect with her family.

However, Dan returned to her life and she gradually discovered him to be a liar who was bankrupt. Le Ly is shocked to find him blaming his Vietnamese wife for all the misfortune. She is further shocked after learning his profession of making weapons teaching the Vietnamese to use American made weapons and later worked as an arms dealer. Surviving the gruesome war and witnessing people's death, Le Ly was unable to accept the fact that Dan was an arms dealer which were used in killing people. "My biggest disappointment was that Dan had lied to me: not just about his personal and financial troubles, but his whole way of life; and not just in Washington,

but from the first time we met”, she admits (Hayslip 212). She decided to call off her marriage with Dan and preferred being “independent” and “captain” of her soul (Hayslip 214).

When Hayslip revisited her native land after years, she was taken aback to witness the deplorable condition of her people and assured herself and her family to help them recover. After returning to U.S after the short stay, she began pondering on her non profit relief project for Vietnam and her desire to bind her old country with the new one, thus resolving all differences. Thus, the foundation East Meets West was born, which she regards as the daughter of her soul. This emphasizes her evolution as a healer, a leader and a teacher. Cliff Parry, another friend of hers helped her in selling the houses to fund her project and fulfill her dream. She ended up being in a relation with Cliff, after extricating herself from the toxic relationship with Dennis. He claims to be a CIA assassin in Vietnam. She describes Cliff both as a “killer and a victim” and became dependent on him and accepts his marriage proposal. Later, she discovers him to be a pathological liar and he failed in all the scams and thus tried to commit suicide. Le Ly lost all the houses because of Cliff and later discovered that he had lawsuits filed against him by companies, bank and physicians.

Hayslip’s trail of relationships is crucial to her formation of self. According to Herman as mentioned in *Trauma and Recovery*, "In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma" (Herman 174). Hayslip admits the process of writing to be painful, traumatic, and cathartic, but ultimately upholds a hope of its transformative power. It is noteworthy that, through her narrative, she continuously tries to make meaning of her survival. The monk, her spiritual mentor guides her in this effort of meaning making. Distraught with her loss, she visits her monk and complained about being a victim all throughout her life. The monk asked her if any man have ever come to her life without a purpose and gradually shaped Hayslip’s orientation of her thought on the traumatic memories. She depicts her own understanding of the experiences and mentions that each person she met prevented her from moving towards the worst. The soldiers who abused her, according to her kept her away from war. She moved to America with Ed after being taken advantage by Anh, her Vietnamese master. In the alien land she suffered from the loss of love which, she received as a daughter in Vietnam. Dan taught her from the mistakes she made with Ed and Dennis kept her away from Dan. Finally, Cliff taught her the lesson of charity and gratitude. Every man she came across taught her, and shaped her life for better.

Hayslip in her memoir foregrounds this ability of drawing positive meaning from traumatic experiences and paving the path for healing. This focus on spiritual growth is a central feature of her war memoirs. Hayslip, transforms her suffering to a therapeutic power which shall heal the wounded hearts. The keen awareness of her suffering triggered her to return to her roots, confront the war torn land and search for ways to heal the trauma of the entire community. In this memoir, she mentions about her trips to Vietnam and her desire to reconnect with her mother. Time and again, the monk she visits for her guidance reminds her of her duty to her ancestors. Despite the warnings and threats, Hayslip makes the trip to Viet Nam and finds "the war still going on" in the hearts and minds of everyone there (Hayslip 243). People are still psychologically affected and their thoughts and attitude display strong signs of hatred towards the Americans.

Her decision to visit Vietnam again raised fear among her friends and were apprehensive if she was ready to fight the war all over again. Her friends turned suspicious and fatalistic and were afraid of being seen with her. But for Hayslip, war was fought not only with guns but with human hearts which she felt can be cured. After the guidance from her monk, she went to the travel agent and planned her departure. She departed for Vietnam with a thin chance of returning. She left her children behind and saw a vision of her deceased father blessing her on her new venture. Her father, through the vision revived her lost sense of self love and encouraged her to fulfill her desires and dreams.

After spending sometime in Vietnam, she returned to U.S and began working seriously on the effects of war on the Vietnamese people. She promised her mother to work for the good of the Vietnamese people and set up a clinic at Ky la, her village. With the publication of her first memoir, she fulfilled one desire of her father and this further strengthened her desire for the humanitarian cause. However, people in Vietnam had doubts regarding her promises. Caught in between the two nations, Hayslip is considered to be a spy by the two nations and is viewed with suspicion.

Hayslip's journey of healing can be viewed in Judith Herman's line of thought who describes healing to be crucial step in recovery from trauma. Hayslip can be seen venturing into this arena of healing, not only for herself but the entire community. Her father's spirit encourages her to undertake the new journey as a healer. However, she suffers from the dilemma of

serving the angry and the needy at the same time because the Vietnamese people share divided opinions over their desire for war and peace. At times like that, the voice of her deceased father guides her to build a center where both sides can come together, rebuild their bodies and make peace with their souls. In her new journey, she embraces the Buddhist values of compassion and positions herself as a healer. Time and again when she visited other gurus, they always passed the same message that she will lead crowd in a “long, hard climb” (Hayslip 168). The Buddhist monks, on the other hand reminded her of her duty towards her ancestors.

Hayslip clearly mentions about the purpose of the book. She writes, "nobody has told Americans what the war was like for ordinary people, villagers and farmers. That will be my job" (Hayslip 283). Rendering voice to the voiceless Vietnamese victims and helping the Americans to identify with their pain and empathize with them are the ultimate goals of her work. She also expects to help and nourish the readers spiritually through the book.

It is noteworthy that, Hayslip refers to the process of writing the memoir in the narrative. During this entire process of adjustment to the New land, Hayslip mentions about working on a war memoir, dictating to Jimmy who typed it to his computer. She admits those sessions to be emotional, painful and cathartic. According to Herman, in the second stage of recovery, the victim narrates the story of the trauma. Hayslip’s memoirs narrate her story of survival and then her gradual healing. Hayslip’s work of retelling her story integrates the traumatic memory into her life story. Narration of traumatic memory is filled with disjunctions instead of being a coherent narration. Hayslip through the narration of her past traumatic experiences relived it and, by narrating it she made peace with her past which was cathartic and relieving for her. She writes,

A day didn’t go by that I didn’t gather my boys into my arms and cry out of relief that the war was over. Often I grieved that they would never know the Vietnamese family life I loved and feared I would never see again (Hayslip 164).

Though Hayslip might be reluctant in assimilating completely into the culture of America, she does not falter in expressing her loyalty towards both the nations. According to her, America provided her with the solace from war, educated her and helped her in raising her three sons.

She urges her fellow villagers to welcome Americans with an open heart and to forgive each other. After the publication of the book in 1989, she became secured about her future and her noble mission. The silent suffering of her Vietnamese people finally achieved a voice and her American family would have access to a different and hidden side of the war. After the publication of the book, she took note of the medical needs of her village and also her brother Bon Nghe offered to help her. Hayslip admits her life being caught in between the Americans and the Vietnamese, between “greed and compassion, capitalism and communism, not quite peace and almost war” (Hayslip 270). Given these in-betweens, she realized her position and her role to bridge the gap between the extremities. Instead of resisting the forces, her mother would advice her to use them in the service of her soul irrespective of the soil beneath her feet. Hayslip dismantles the racial and territorial boundaries between people. Behind their colorful skins lie the fact that they are the children of one planet and humanity lies beneath their choice of freedom, independence and responsibility.

The sight of her house after years has been described by her through intense emotions, thus reinstating the significance of the place in her life. The house stood in the shadow of the ancient Sau Dau tree, which was burnt by the French but was rebuilt. With time, her memories altered but the place would always be her home which nurtured her like a loving mother.

She felt as ancient as the stones after surviving long wars and a journey to the New World. After spending a week there, she returned to the States and began planning with her son, Jimmy. Gradually, she succeeded in starting the clinic which according to her is not charity but she was “saving” her soul (Hayslip 271).

With firm determination, Le Ly accomplished all her promises in Vietnam and finally left Vietnam with her sons. The memoir ends with a positive note of togetherness and hope. The clinic, stood in the shadow of the Sau Dau tree and at last, the soil beneath her feet made no difference. She hails mother Earth, dismissing territorial boundaries of being an American or a Vietnamese. Mother Earth is her home and all her children are her brothers and sisters.

The memoir provides the readers with an access into the interplay of thoughts and feelings and the perception of war from the perspective of the victims. Jennifer Wallach, in the article, “Building a bridge of Words”, refers this as “empathetic reconstruction’ (Wallach, “Building a Bridge of Words” 449). Hayslip’s attempt to revisit the past and her effort to

understand the pain of the people and the desire to heal them can be considered as an effort of emphatic reconstruction of the past. Hayslip depicts the Vietnamese people as they are and would prefer to be seen and understood. The tone of the memoir is nostalgic and meditative, aggressive at times and melancholic at other times, pragmatic as well as prophetic.

It is noteworthy that Hayslip's Self undergoes constant change and loss because of the socio cultural factors. The loss of earlier self leads to the beginning of new Self. Hayslip's core experiences of trauma includes as in Herman's words "disempowerment and disconnection from others" (Herman 22). The people of her village viewed herself as a traitor after she married the American man Ed Munro and went to America to escape the atrocities of war. She suffered from a disconnection from her people as well as was not able to connect with the people of the alien land. Her husbands including Ed and Dennis regulated her life thus relegating her to a completely helpless state. Recovery of Hayslip from the past trauma and the alienation in the new land shall be based on the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new and promising connections. Recovery takes place within context of relationships and cannot occur in isolation. Hayslip's group of Vietnamese friends in America rendered her a sense of connection to her native land.

Hayslip's resolution to return to her native land and face the horrors of the past is another crucial step in her healing process. The foundational notion of empowerment is applicable to the second stage of recovery. The choice to confront the horrors of the past rests with the survivor. At times, the horrors of the past turns to be unspeakable for which much courage and patience is required on the part of the survivor. Apart from the traumatic moments, Hayslip reconstructs the trauma also through the comprehension of the circumstances that led to the trauma. Hayslip's reconstruction of her trauma entails her life before the trauma and the circumstances that led to the trauma. A sense of continuity is restored with the past. Hayslip's relationships, dreams, struggles and conflicts preceding the traumatic events are recounted by Hayslip vividly. These personal details set the ground for the exploration of the meaning and significance of trauma in her life. It is evident that Hayslip, while developing her traumatic story delves deep into questions of guilt, morality and responsibility. During her initial days in America, she suffered from a breach in her sense of belonging and her system of belief. Apart from the trauma of war, Hayslip, in America suffered from personal familial trauma. Hayslip suffered from trauma in her relationships which stems from the earlier trauma of the war. Many a times, she related specific events of her life in America, for instance, Ed's slow painful death to the death of her father in Vietnam.

Time and again, she used warfare language to describe her emotions thus foregrounding the intensity of the imprint that war left on her mind. Losing her loved ones to the cruelty of war, she experienced an unexplainable void in the new relations that she tried to embrace herself with. Traumatic losses often rupture the normal sense or the generally accepted social conventions of bereavement. The narration of the traumatic incident in a way, lets the survivor come in terms with the trauma and in the process, the survivor expresses deep sense of grief. Only a higher sense of purpose can heal the trauma of the victim partially, if not fully. For Hayslip, her sense of purpose which extends beyond mere reconciliation of the East and the West gave her life a new direction. Her sense of purpose rests in the notion of forgiveness. She hails the message of forgiving not only those who meted out atrocities but a deeper sense of forgiving one's own soul and redeeming oneself of all the mistakes committed. Her deeper sense of purpose is to make the world a little better and never die as a spiritual debtor. She eventually gains a feeling of being independent and maintaining her own views while respecting those of others. Earlier, because of the trauma and the challenges of her new life, Hayslip's sense of individuality was challenged. However, with time, she began taking initiatives and in that process created new identity for herself. This according to Herman, is another stage of recovery where the survivor reconciles with the trauma in her own life. Her journey from being victim to a healer and a teacher epitomizes her gradual evolution of her sense of self and ownership.

It is noteworthy that, Hayslip instead of trying to escape from the past memories of the atrocities, confronted them and revisited her village Ky La after twenty years. The trauma for Hayslip, never disappeared but was deeply imprinted in her psyche and surfaces occasionally. This process of remembering and telling the truth about horrific events are imperative for the restoration of the social order as well as for the healing of individual victims. Hayslip, initially was caught in the psychological dilemma of denying and escaping the traumatic past and proclaiming them aloud. With the intention of escaping war, she married Ed and landed in America. However, the narrow and partial view of the Americans and their indifferent attitude towards the pain of the Vietnamese shook her to the core. Therefore, she decided to write her stories of trauma to enable her American family and the fellow Americans to have an insight into their struggle. Time and again, she was reminded of her duty towards her ancestors by her spiritual mentors and the vision of her father's deceased spirit. Therefore, she embarked on a journey of healing the people through small efforts. These two visions of Le Ly, of narrating the truth and healing the people helped her to free herself of the psychological dilemma and thus, she chose to proclaim the traumatic events clear and loud.

Towards the end, it can be seen that Hayslip, no longer feels being possessed by the traumatic past. Instead, she gains a sense of individuality and ventures on the journey to be the person she wants to be. For Hayslip, the values of her ancestors, as well as the teachings from the life in America helped her to overcome her sense of helplessness and futility. She now demonstrates her power to revisit old hopes and dreams. Hayslip's attitude of making peace with her past and letting go of some of the traumatic aspects helped her in forgiving herself. In the afterword of the first memoir, she mentions about the significance and the power of forgiving oneself and letting go of the past events. Hayslip, to resolve the trauma called upon the wider world and most importantly herself. She made an attempt to transform the personal tragedy through social action, which in her case included the publishing of the memoirs, the establishment of the clinic and the East and West foundation. She embarked upon the difficult journey of telling the truth and presenting the Vietnamese survivors' version of the war which was often overlooked.

As mentioned by Herman, the process of recovery also entails transcending the personal grievances against the perpetrator and the battle becomes part of the larger on going struggle of the people to voice their opinions. Hayslip mentions in the after word that "we all are in the same boat, we all must help each other", thus being a part of the larger struggle rendering herself a sense of satisfaction (Hayslip 371). Adhering to Herman's thoughts that the resolution and recovery of trauma is never complete and final, Hayslip too mentions that their journey never ends. Only through solidarity, they can create a meaning out of the traumatic events and thus, facilitate a sense of belonging.

The traumatic events in a way enabled Hayslip to recover and sustain her bonds with her community. Connection to others, be it to her ancestors or her community enables her to retain her sense of self and worth. The trauma isolated her from her loved ones leading her to fend for herself in the alien land. However, with her return to her community, recovering the broken relations helped her in creating a sense of belongingness. This sense of belongingness is crucial to the journey of healing of herself as well as the entire community. In order to avoid reliving the past, the traumatized victims need to reminisce, mourn and recompense for their wrongs done. Hayslip epitomizes this process of remembering and mourning.

The memoir, thus is a reflection on her life enabling the readers to establish emotional connections with the events they never experienced. Literature here, paved the path of understanding the world and also opens up ample of avenues of thought and research on a

post conflict situation provides the readers with a deep engagement with a complex process of coming to terms with the traumatic past. Though it might not provide an easy remedy to the trauma, it enables us to think through and make sense of the moral and emotional complexities. Hayslip's memoir enables the readers to revisit the past, and reconstruct history and make meaning of the present situation in the light of the past events.

For Hayslip, her autobiographical Self stems from her autobiographical memories. The autobiographical memories, for Hayslip constitutes her personhood and identity. Her Self is the primary constituent of the conscious and unconscious experiences. Hayslip articulates her Self through her narrative. Hayslip's memoir is not a simple recapitulation of the past but a thought provoking account of her life events and she seeks for herself through her history. In a way, her understanding of her Self, her personhood, evolved through the series of event; both traumatic and pleasant.

Autobiographical self is conditioned by one's time and culture. Hayslip's autobiographical self is constituted by two notions: who she was and what she became. Her self should be comprehended in continuous manner and cannot be said to be independent of the circumstances and the socio-cultural structures. The effects of the Vietnam War shaped her life and the perception of herself. From perceiving herself as a power less and helpless victim of the war and later of the American materialism, Hayslip's initial perception of herself gradually evolved with time. Surviving the loss of her loved ones and alienation from her native land, Hayslip went through rape and was nearly saved from being killed. In order to escape from all these atrocities: both mental and physical, Hayslip went to America with the desire of securing her future. However, she ended up being the victim of American materialism and hegemonic masculinity and thus, underwent other traumatic experiences. However, she gradually turns to a crusader for peace and begins her journey as a healer.

Her memoir is a source of enlightenment and attempts to break the "pattern of hateful feelings" (Hayslip 367). It is noteworthy that Hayslip foregrounds the effect of war on both the sides. According to her, thousands of U.S Veterans are still struggling with the wounds inflicted on their bodies and spirits. In the same manner, thousands of people of Vietnam are still suffering from their "victory" (Hayslip 366). Crippled in spirit and body from the war related disabilities, both the sides suffered from the pathetic outcomes of the war. Many Amerasian children are still to find their home. By foregrounding the effects of war on both the nations,

Hayslip tries to draw a parallel in the sufferings of the people of the two nations and bring them together on a common plane and break the chain of vengeance forever.

In America, with the understanding of her purpose of life and her duty towards her ancestors and her people, she developed her sense of self as healer and a teacher hailing the message of forgiveness through her works. Her independence and her liberated sense of self stems from her sense of belongingness to her roots.

For Hayslip, writing came as a form of liberation and also as a form of self analysis. However, it cannot be regarded as the final fixed image because a continuous evolution of the self is inevitable. As claimed by Georges Gurdorf, memoirs look to an essence beyond existence, Hayslip's memoir too foregrounds the essence of life in making peace with our own shortcomings and disturbed past. Hayslip's memoirs, thus, provides an insight to the readers on her gradual evolution of Self which is more or less subjected to her prevailing circumstances. Her memoirs foreground the significance of an Asian immigrant women carving out a niche for herself in the Western scholarship and reproducing her experiences without any external manipulation. She depicts the significance of producing knowledge and introducing the readers to the innermost, intimate and intricate experiences of the Vietnam War which has been generally overlooked. However, question arises on the fictionality of language and its ability to capture exactly an event of the past, years later. The very effort of recollecting the past events in a systematic manner to let the readers understand their past, itself involves an element of imagination. And, imagination is an inevitable feature of fiction. Therefore, the role of language and the process of recollection of the past events raise serious questions on the nature of memoirs or other life writings.

The power of a narrative lies in the creation of a sense of continuity. Hayslip's narration integrates her reconstructed past in the present along with the anticipation of a peaceful future thus rendering a sense of beginning, middle and an end to her narrative. Her uninterrupted narrative also foregrounds a sense of continuity of Hayslip's self evolution. The Vietnam War provides a significant context for the understanding of her Self. Hayslip's comprehension of her Self during the war is marked by endless atrocities and helplessness. The post war period in America introduces the readers to a different facet of Hayslip's Self which is empowered, liberated and assuring. These changes can be regarded as two significant extremities within the ambit of which lies a host of activities embedded in the socio cultural life that triggers the changes. Hayslip's Self, in different phases, responding to the external demands evolve gradually for better. Her Diaspora Self is characterized more with freedom, hope and assurance which are undergirded with feelings of nostalgia for her homeland.

Hayslip's adherence, love and honor for her Vietnamese ideals, her people and Vietnam in a way assisted her in staying firm in her decisions. Her nostalgia for her homeland was marked with promises of reinvigoration of life and hope to the war torn land. Her nostalgia was not just a yearning for her homeland but instead, is a strong desire to return to her people and bring in transformation to their lives torn apart by the gruesome war. This nostalgia for her homeland, accompanied by a desire for transformation paved her path for her journey as a healer and a preacher of peace and love. Thus, from being an impotent war survivor to being an agency of spreading peace, love and transformation, Hayslip's Self evolved over time.

It is noteworthy that her memoirs trigger the mind of the readers over a thought provoking question that whether literature and fiction like Hayslip's memoirs, in the present day context can contribute to peace building and guide people through conflicts in the modern era.

Chapter V

Anatomy of Difference

This chapter aims at delineating the differences in formations of ‘Self’ discussed in the earlier chapters. Even though, ‘Self’ seems to be a universal concept inherent to the individuals, there might exist variations in the expression of these individual selves. This chapter shall foreground these variations in the formation of Self. The different aspects which constitute a Self might vary thus foregrounding the polysemic nature of self. These varied aspects might be associated with social roles, ethical responsibilities, cultural positioning etc. “Self” entails the variegated concepts of individuality, mental entity and agency. The different aspects that lead to the variations in self are arranged in different patterns. Self accommodates different concepts of the person including the individual’s physical and mental entity and also the social positioning. Differences in the understanding of personhood, however, do not necessarily imply differences in the definition of self. Self, which is constituted of a pattern of aspects, when seen through specified lens of cultural practices, social roles or moral responsibilities, accommodates variations of personhood which distinguishes one individual from the other. In order to delve deep into the variations in the nature of self formations, a comparative study of the narrative structure, themes and backdrop of the works discussed in the previous chapters shall be undertaken here.

The range of writers selected for the study provides a scope for a comparative study of the diversity of the Diaspora selves and the narrative structure. Certain attributes including nostalgia and homesickness are generally assumed to be the distinguishing features of a Diaspora self. Displacement from one’s native land underlies the creation of a Diaspora. The person, in this process of displacement undergoes a transformation thus, creating for himself a changed version of his earlier self. Diaspora writers across the world capture this transformation through words and foregrounds a pattern of the organization of the aspects of the self which leads to the variations in the Diaspora selves.

The three Vietnamese American writers which were selected for the study included, Ly Hayslip, Thanhha Lai and Le Thi Diem Thuy. These women Vietnamese American writers shares the common backdrop of the gruesome Vietnam War with long lasting psychological

ramifications. Their works are a strong personal reflection on the war and its effects. However, attention should be drawn towards their difference in the manner and mode of representation of their war experiences and its aftermath. Relying heavily on their inner voice, the three women writers adopt different modes of expression unique to themselves. This, in turn opens up possibilities to re imagine Vietnam War in variegated ways. The writers contemplate on their journey, both spiritual and external. From being faceless and voiceless refugees to being empowered Asian American citizens, their journey speaks of their transformations and evolution. Their representation of their refugee experience and American experience vary in significant ways. However, common to them is the trauma of the past and their struggle in the unknown land.

Hayslip's literary and personal life entails a remembrance of her personal loss as well as it epitomizes the collective pain and trauma of the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese refugee Diaspora in America. Her works involve instances that speak for the loss of the entire community. For Hayslip, the need of remembering turns out to be productive. Remembering, for Hayslip enables her to confront her traumatic past and make peace with it by helping other refugees and the war survivors to overcome the physical and psychological wounds. Hayslip's narratives foreground the significance of ancestors in the lives of the younger ones. She acknowledges the guidance of her deceased father and other ancestors throughout her journey. In doing so, she presents the Vietnamese world view of the dead as being inextricable part of the living. Further, her works bring forth the American perspective on the refugees, who were generally perceived as a troubled and unwanted category of people. However, it is noteworthy that she relies heavily on a co author as she did not yet develop the ability to articulate her expressions and feelings in English. Her work is one of the formative Vietnamese American narrative that presents the Vietnamese American voice, often overlooked. Hayslip's memoirs provide us with an insight into the complex and often difficult conditions under which she carved for her herself a niche in the Vietnamese American literature and America's historical literature and cultural landscape. Her memoirs can be said to have acquired a special status in American mainstream. Hayslip's writings hold the power to evoke the strongest emotions of the past that enables the readers to empathize with her. Hayslip, while with her American family, many a times underwent the painful traumatic memories when the heart wrenching pictures of war torn Vietnam were telecasted. In moments such as those, she could feel a strong disconnection with her American family who failed to see through the pain of the poor people. Her writing is gripping, excruciatingly painful and piercingly honest. Eloquently written in simple English,

her memoirs stand as a testimony to the clarity of her voice that screams aloud the pain of her people, often unheard. Depicting the deadly side of war which extends beyond the mere physical wounds, Hayslip presents the predicament of an immigrant in a post conflict situation. From surviving the deadliest outcomes of war to establishing herself as a writer and a healer in America, Hayslip's memoirs trace the development of her Self.

Breaking the circle of vengeance emerges as the primary aim of Hayslip and her efforts. Hayslip was born into war and her struggle for her survival in a war devastated land from birth is captured in her first memoir. Her return to Vietnam in 1986, years later after the departure, mentioned in her work is a landmark in her journey as a healer and a teacher. Four years later, the second memoir, *Child of War Women of Peace* was published which depicted her life in America, as a young woman, twice widowed and surviving with her children in the new land. The nature of war can be compared to her thoughts in the afterword that nothing actually begins and ends, "it only changes from one thing to the other" (Hayslip 386). The war too had similar effects. Even after the end of the mass killings, the war did not end. There existed psychologically wounded U.S veterans and Vietnamese war Veterans, the infants and the Amerasian children still struggling to find a home. The horrific memories that haunt the survivors even after years stand as a testimony to the continuation of war, this time with their minds. Thus, the war never ended, but changed its nature.

Hayslip's memoirs are crucial because it extends beyond the mere recollection of the violence and the events that led towards it. The second memoir, dealing with the aftermath presents the disturbed psyche of a women refugee struggling in America to find a space and a name of her own. Caught between her struggle to understand the American culture and her allegiance to her Vietnamese culture, Hayslip focuses on striking a balance between the two. She honors the American flag as well as obeys her cultural ideals and ancestral knowledge. For her, the war did not end with the victory of Vietnam. Instead it led to numerous conflicts, on a personal level as well for the entire Vietnamese community. Hayslip fought wars against racism, hatred and marginalization of the third world refugees. In continuation to the earlier thought of circumstances being subjected to constant change, the war too led to the rudimentary efforts of healing of the war torn land and its people. The publication of the first memoir, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, paved the path for better and hopeful times ahead.

Through her humanitarian efforts, she ventured on her journey to break the circle of vengeance. Hayslip foregrounds the significance of ‘individual efforts’ of finding peace. According to her, time and effort holds the power of changing circumstances. She foregrounds that the process of peace lies dormant in one’s soul that just waits “only for an opportunity to blossom” (Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* 371). Cultivating this happy side of the spirit shall depend upon the individuals and shall be a crucial move towards the establishment of peace on a community level.

It is noteworthy that Hayslip depicts the richness and the diversity of the traditional Vietnamese religion. This Vietnamese perspective presents to the readers a different perspective on war, which extends beyond political dealings or mere vengeance. Hayslip, without any inhibitions depict the Vietnamese belief in the world of ghosts and spirits. The world of living and the dead almost were experienced in a parallel manner in the Vietnamese world. Hence, it can be seen that in her new journey the divine intervention of her deceased father and the soul of the ancestors played a vital role. Hayslip foregrounds her life as being regulated by a vast array of beliefs and practices. Religion, for them governed their life before birth and beyond the grave. The dead, though they passed onto the other world lived very close to the land of the living, constantly guiding them like Hayslip’s father. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism shaped the religious life of Vietnam which is well reflected in Hayslip’s writings. Worship of the ancestors and filial piety governs their life. For Hayslip too, these values played a paramount role in her journey from war to peace. Hayslip’s writings, in a way, challenge the effacement of the Vietnamese culture and the disfiguration of the personhood of the Vietnamese war survivors. It is noteworthy that the greatest challenge she might have faced in her life as an immigrant would be her painful return to her traumatic memories and yet she taught the world hope and positivity amidst all diversities.

The genre of her narrative, memoir, raises serious issues regarding the cult of memory generally perceived. Question arises if remembering and never forgetting is a moral duty. Nancy K Miller, mentions that this presumption to always remember and never forget is artificial and fails to represent the memories in its originality and distorts the real meaning of memory. The language of Hayslip’s memoir of trauma bears a heavy burden of theorization of trauma. At times, there occurs difficulty in the articulation of the traumatic memories.

Therefore, for the author, it turns into challenge to create a “language that will manifest and contain trauma” (Gilmore, “Limitcases: Trauma, self representation, and the jurisdiction of identity” 155). It is also crucial for the author to take note of the readers and design her narrative accordingly. Therefore, Hayslip presents her thoughts in English for the audience to gain an insight into the plight of the Vietnamese war survivors. The memoir employs conscious language in a structured setting. Hayslip’s autobiographical writings draw on self representation and personal identity. However, it is noteworthy that Hayslip’s understanding of her autobiographical self cannot be separated from her family, in Vietnam and her American family and the community as a whole. Hayslip’s memoirs establish her independent notion of personhood, thus leaving behind a memorial to herself. Her self-reflexive discourse adds authenticity to her expression. One of the earliest theorist of autobiography, Georges Gusdorf mentions that life writing is an act that is made possible by the evolution of self consciousness. For memoirs and autobiographies to exist, the idea of the self has to travel through various stages. For Hayslip too, her journey from being an immigrant to a writer and a healer, her self evolved with time. Hayslip’s memoir as mentioned by her has a vivid aim of depicting the darker side of Vietnam War to the thousands of Americans who never saw the Vietnam War through the lens of the poor Vietnamese peasants. She intends to forge a message peace and forgiveness through her words. Hayslip, it can be argued, to be on a journey of discovery where she finds herself evolving with time.

Similar to Hayslip, Thanhha Lai is a Vietnam born American writer, who after experiencing the plight of the Vietnam War, fled Vietnam on a boat with other thousands of refugees and finally settled in Alabama. The threat of invasion from the forces in the North forced the family to flee on a South Vietnamese naval ship and was rescued by an American ship. Written with a similar backdrop, Lai’s tale is a collection of powerful prose poems narrated by a child refugee. Through the fictional character Ha, a ten year old refugee, Lai foregrounds the pathetic tale of displacement. Ha, the little girl felt the pain of separation from her homeland deeply but failed to express it in words. Lai’s tale bears the touch of originality through Ha’s expression of the raw emotions in an outright manner which explodes suddenly through precise expressions. Similar to Hayslip, Lai presents the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The tale is a story of change and growth of the little girl Ha, who with her mother and brothers embarked on a ship towards America. As a child, Ha could not comprehend the reason behind their leaving of their beloved land. Lai delves deep into the mind of Ha, who as a child refugee tried to present her version of the Vietnam War. In the novel, Lai employs imagery to convey the strongest and the deepest of the emotions.

Ha's beloved papaya tree symbolizes her authentic love for her old world. With the cutting down of the papaya tree, a part of her old self was being lost. Ha, was aware about her displacement and her separation from her beloved land but fails to understand why all her closed ones including her father failed to accompany them to America. Lai expresses the strongest of emotions through the simplest of objects that a child could perceive. For Ha, her sadness came from the loss of her papaya tree and her dolls.

It is noteworthy that, Lai, similar to Hayslip, being a survivor of the Vietnam War captures the pain of displacement. However, the difference between them lies in their narrative structure and the perspectives employed. It is noteworthy that, in *Inside out and Back Again*, Lai employs the perspective of a little girl, narrated through the eyes of an adult. Unlike Hayslip's autobiographical writing, the fictional nature of Lai's semi autobiographical novel is evident through certain actions which were consciously executed. As for instance, towards the end of the book, when Ha gathered her courage to knock down the bully, she refrained from committing further violence, perhaps primarily to convey a message of foregrounding one's abilities without violence. Foregrounding one's capabilities without committing violence, is what Lai stressed upon.

It is noteworthy that, the little girl's struggle to learn English is not less than a nightmare. She thinks in Vietnamese and expresses in English. For the expression of her feelings, Ha very often relies on images, perhaps because the language in which she articulates her thoughts, Vietnamese, is derived from Chinese which is largely based on pictures. Therefore, for Ha, images hold the power of spontaneously lending a poetic melody to the text. Lai, very well unveils the inner world of Ha and for doing so relies on her own voice.

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that, Lai pens down her thoughts after years of her experience. Through this semi autobiographical work, Lai as an adult revisits her childhood and tries to re imagine her past through the lens of an adult. This allowed her to narrate the story in a more comprehensive manner, thus analyzing the events in depth, which as a child she might have even failed to perceive. She revisited her past through Ha and foregrounded certain emotions, which Ha as a child might have failed to comprehend. However, Lai did not restrict herself only to the description of trauma and sadness at the displacement. For her, trauma and pain was inevitably present in the background and was the foundation on which the story was based. Lai, instead focused more on Ha's overcoming of her trauma and fear. She focused on

Ha's zeal and her indomitable spirit of fighting against all the racist approaches. Despite undergoing hatred and marginalization, Ha finally overcame all the adversities and found a voice for herself.

Laughter is undoubtedly the best way to counter sadness and hence Lai employed humor in her work in the best possible way. The humor in her work might come across as a surprise for the readers and other writers who shall read the book with the preconceived notion of being extremely painful, the backdrop being the gruesome Vietnam War. Hayslip, on the other hand wrote the book nearly after thirty years of her experience and by the time she revisited her past, she had worked through her emotions and thus re imagines the war.

Lai's formidable characters including Ha's mother who made the bold decision of moving to America without their father who was in action for nine years is crucial to the text. The development of Ha's self is quite evident in the story. The voiceless child refugee slowly felt the need to reclaim her language, her voice and her space which was taken away from her. Ha felt the need to reclaim a new language to yell back at the kids who bullied her at school. Ha was caught between losing her own language and the tussle with a new alien language. The role of language is crucial to the text, because language enabled Ha to claim for herself new identity and challenge the derogatory notions associated with the category of refugees. Lai being born into politics and war, felt writing to be crucial in order to defend herself. Writing, for Ha had a purpose which was to voice out her suppressed traumatic experiences. The text is both political and personal, and poetry as a medium of expression, helped her to fulfill that aim.

Similar to Lai, Le Thi Diem Thuy too adopts a child narrator in the narration of the story in her novel *The Gangster We are all Looking For*. With the similar backdrop of Vietnam War, the story, at the base, is about personal freedom. The father being a gangster, was a rebel against the normative standards in Vietnam. He feels marginalized in America and undergoes a different kind of isolation. Thuy's novel resonates with Lai's idea that Vietnam is more than war. Talking only about war would keep the war awake in the hearts of the people and also would limit the perspectives on Vietnam. Therefore, Thuy, in her novel draws on varied themes including the portrait of a troubled marriage. She challenges the model minority trap where Asians felt good talking only about the good things and in that process many significant moments were ignored.

Thuy's novel is nonlinear, moving back and forth in time, thus reflecting the workings of the memory. The refugee family, in their effort to make their way into the new world, are pulled

backwards in time to Vietnam. Their difficulty of adjusting in San Diego is caused by the difficulty of letting go and confronting their past. Thuy, presents an insight into the conflicting mind of the characters for whom the process of displacement and their state of being a refugee turns to a nightmare at times. It is noteworthy that Thuy did not name her protagonist, primarily perhaps because, in Vietnam people exist in relation to each other. The novel starts with the young voice and as time passes by, the voice gradually matures. Finally, a change in the helpless and disoriented self of the narrator could be seen when she desires to be a gangster when she grows up. This bold claim of the girl is crucial because it divides the text into before and after timelines. The gangster, here is an idea and also an ideal, representing liberation. After internalizing the idea of a gangster, she no longer seeks for explanations from her parents but, instead, sets out on her own. Thuy, through the narrator speaks about maturity. As the narrator matures, she develops the capacity to analyze her relationship with her father and dreads being like him. Thuy, in her narrative, foregrounds the father daughter relationship that matured with time. It is crucial to note that, after they earned sponsorship from an American family, the daughter speaks for her father as he fails to articulate his thoughts in English. These are small instances of world reversals which triggers the father to ponder on his duty. It is worth mentioning that, Thuy, apart from being a writer, is also a performance artist. For her, music and pictures hold the power to convey the raw deep emotions. Therefore, in many instances she could be seen employing rhyming words to convey her thoughts. For instance, “hush! Hush! Hush!”, was the fragrance of the lullaby that her mother used to sing to her quite often.

A comparison of Thuy’s child narrator with Ha by Lai shall throw light on the differences in their narrative structure. Both the child narrators mature with time and initially failed to understand why all their loved ones could not accompany them to America. However, with time, their selves evolved and later they found a voice for themselves. Both of them left behind either of their parents and ventured on the new journey with a shattered past towards an unknown future. Both the writers foreground the significance and power of imagery in conveying their emotions. For Thuy, water symbolized the family’s shattered past and their aching memories of the past. She explores the idea of water and the loss of water and its significance throughout the text. Time and again, water brings back the memories of her people. On one occasion, when the child saw the water in the swimming pool being drained off, she was overpowered with thoughts of the past, of her people, who set off on journey to an unknown location. Water imagery carries the story

forward and the images deepen the understanding. She laid her soul bare through the intense language to bring a song out to the world. For them, the war did not end with the fall of Saigon. Instead, a long aftermath followed and it took ages for both the writers and their characters to absorb and understand what happened. It is crucial to note that both the writers wrote their narratives years after living in America which enabled them to express a complete and a nuanced perspective of the Vietnam War both as victims and survivor. However, it is noteworthy that, Lai employs humor as a technique to delve deep into the mind of Ha and Thuy, on the other hand employs troubling world pictures which are hauntingly painful to portray the conflicted state of mind of her protagonist. Her tale is simple and yet has deeper meanings tied to the deceptively simple tale. With concrete details of the most vulnerable selves of the characters, Thuy dismantles all the anticipations from a war narrative written by a refugee. She does not encourage the usual stereotypes of a loving and all embracing immigrant family. Instead, the story has an unsettled quality of the life of a refugee family in America. Unlike Ha's formidable mother, who, for survival in the alien land inculcates in her children the necessity of learning English and encourages them to learn English during their time in the refugee camp, The parents in Thuy's narrative, on the other hand, are depicted to be in the captivity of the harrowing past, struggling to confront their past and survive in the present. Both the narrators, towards the end demonstrate an unflinching attitude in the face of adversity. Both the characters have enormous desire to comprehend their past. Both the novels expand over years and trace the development of the selves of the characters. Even though Vietnam War as the major drive for the plot cannot be ignored, the writers refrain from promoting the accepted notions surrounding the phenomenon of war. Instead, they open up new possibilities of perceiving war in a different manner by not only writing people into being but also empowering the characters, which is a rare occurrence in tragic war narratives. However, it is noteworthy that there lies a difference in the lives of both the child narrators after they reach America. One cannot deny the fact that both the narrators experienced the American life differently despite the fact that both of them were the victims of the Vietnam War and fled Vietnam as refugees. Ha from *Inside out and Back Again*, primarily fought against the racist perceptions that she was subjected to, firstly for being an Asian and secondly a refugee. In the section titled "Alabama", the third section of the novel, Lai expresses in detail Ha's struggle to understand the alien culture. Ha experiences a sense of complete alienation when she failed to understand the way in which life is perceived in America.

From the critical English language to the American food and festivities, every notion that defined America came as a challenge for Ha. The unbearable racist behaviour of her friends in school, who reminded her of the difference between them every single day, further increased her anxiety. All these, in a way defined Ha's initial days in America. On the other hand, in Le Thi Diem Thuy's novel, *The Gangster We are all Looking For*, the child narrator apart from struggling to adjust in the alien land was traumatized with the memories of her dead brother who lost his life in the sea. Water reminded her of the traumatic memories. Her initial life in America is characterized by the traumatic hallucinations and a struggle to confront her traumatic past.

Thus, the lives of both the narrators in America speak of different tales of survival, fighting with different forces, either of the external world or the inner demons. It is worth mentioning that, both the protagonists matured with time and found their own ways of making peace with the past and negotiating with the present.

Unlike the previous three Asian American writers, Gish Jen is a first generation Chinese American writer born in New York. Her novels selected are characterized by a post modern narrative of decentredness and fragmentation, irony and inter textuality. AI O. Mashchenko in the article, *Gish Jen: Loosening the Canyon of the Canon* mentions that, "Jen's texts is either suggestive: it recurs, repeatedly mirrors and changes modes – from the tragic to sentimental and ironic; or it can be intentionally focused and fragmented" (Mashchenko 11). Jen weaves sophisticated communication techniques into her texts which can be analysed through a variety of influential postcolonial theories. In the sequel to *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, Jen foregrounds the theme of generational gap. She establishes a distinction between Chinese parents and Chinese children born in America. Theme of racial and cultural discrimination marks her texts. Jen does not restrict the struggle of the immigrants for mere survival but also paints characters with successful business. Chinese wives, in the novels are depicted to be successful and quite active in their inner world and the external world of business. Jen in her second novel, celebrates the idea of fluidity of ethnicity and religion through her character Mona.

Self and family is big tension along which she writes that characterizes her as Asian writer. Racial isolation is crucial to her writings. Jen's stories are not just about immigrants fitting in the new society. Her notion of assimilation is far deeper and complicated. Her protagonist

Ralph is not just a poor immigrant struggling to make a living, but brings with him perceptual diversity and somehow remakes the society.

For Jen, heritage, culture and the country shapes the identity. An individual, according to her can own multiple selves. Their selves are individual as well as interdependent and flexible. Individualism, for Jen does not refer to self centredness. Instead, individualism for Jen refers to a sense of essence which lies within the individuals. For Jen, the different selves, particularly the individual and the flexible self lie in a continuum. Each of them dominates in different times and cannot be separated from each other. In Asia, the culture plays the dominant role in determining the truth and in the West, the highest cultural ideal lies within the individual. The individual is the independent agent of one's actions. One's self is thus, shaped by the socio cultural arena. It is noteworthy that, Jen throws light at the life of the migrants in the alien land without giving into the dominant migrant narrative. Jen's migrants are empowered individuals towards the end. She traces a development of their selves throughout their journey and thus foregrounds multiple selves of an individual.

Jen's narratives are different from the Vietnamese American narratives discussed primarily because of the difference in the backdrop of the narratives. The Vietnamese American narratives are the tales of war survivors surviving in an alien land whereas Jen's narratives are insightful tales of immigrants experiencing the trials and triumphs of the American life. The backdrop of Jen's narrative, however, is the communist control of China which led Ralph Chang to move to America and seek the American dream of self invention. It is significant to note that there occurs necessity in differentiating between the category of refugees and immigrants as the works discussed centers around both the categories. Immigrants are people who move from one place to another voluntarily and fit into legal framework of the host country. On the other hand, refugees are the unwanted people who move to a host country because of some crises and tragedy. People in the host countries often think that they owe moral obligations to refugees. As for instance, after the Vietnam War, America viewed their acceptance of Vietnamese refugees as moral obligation, after the huge damage caused. However, it is noteworthy that the history of the refugees was erased from Vietnamese and American history. These erasures were enormously meaningful.

At the same time, people are skeptical about the refugees for what they might bring with them. It might be desperation for a living, fear, disease etc. The term refugees bear negative connotations and are often seen as the troubling category. The concern for this unwanted category is a significant arena of study because we reside in a time, where the concern for refugees is a part of global consciousness.

All the characters in the novels tried to make sense of their memories as well as tried to forget the bitter ones. However, they were reminded constantly about their history and difference in one way or the other. It is crucial to note that the writers, very aptly weaved their stories with the understanding of history, identity and politics. All their works dealt with the journey into being someone. This journey is an intensely personal one not only as an immigrant or a refugee but as someone who could never forget questions of history, identity and politics. All these, brought together enhances the understanding of the texts that belongs to the category of Asian Americans, which is not just a name but has an entire narrative underlying it. It is noteworthy that all the writers discussed above claim the possibility of multiplicity of identifications as a writer as well as multiple identities in the novels. The novels do not only fit into the American tradition but also fits into the tradition of Vietnamese literature. The writers in a way, challenges the notion of an Asian American writer who is expected to focus on Americanization and embrace the great American dream.

War and conflict characterizes the writings of the three Vietnamese American writers. Revolutions, here lead to disillusionments but also solidarities. Their solidarity can be interpreted on an individual level as well as on the community level. The Vietnamese American writer, Le Ly Hayslip, who fled Vietnam, eventually confronted her brutal past and forges peace between the two nations. Her story is both of triumph and survival. Her pursuit to heal the wounds of the war and build a bridge between the East and the West stands as a testimony for her journey from war to peace and beyond. While doing so, she redefines the refugee status and presents the readers with an empowered notion of a refugee. Her tireless efforts demonstrate the profound effect one person can have in the lives of the millions. Similar to Hayslip, Thanhha Lai's protagonist, Ha, too redefines the conventional definition of refugee as a helpless and voiceless category of people by fighting against all the racial discriminations she faced in America. Thuy's protagonist too sets off on a journey of self discovery and struggles to make peace with her refugee status.

Though the refugees are seen to adjust culturally and economically in the host nation, question rises regarding their yearnings for their homeland, whose presence cannot be obliterated completely. The novels provoke all the different categories of dealing with the refugee status.

Gish Jen, unlike the previous writers is a second generation immigrant who grew up in New York. Her parents were unwilling immigrants who refused to accept the citizenship offered to them based on Refugee law. Her writings, unlike the Vietnamese American writers are not based on traumatic events. However, her works delves deep into the immigrant experience of Asian migrants which is a basic characteristic of Diaspora literature. Her works are more inclined towards the individual development which is crucial to western narratives. The change of her Chinese name Lilian to Gish Jen is crucial to her Asian American identity. The English name, as expressed by her in an interview gave her more freedom for self expression as well as acceptance which the name Lilian would not have allowed. It is noteworthy that, her novels, particularly *Mona in the Promised Land*, the sequel to *Typical American*, dwells upon the multiple possibilities of expression of one's self. Jen, in a way challenged the traditional diaspora narratives where nostalgia, and homesickness were given prime importance. Her protagonist in *Typical American* too, migrated to America, to pursue doctorate degree and eventually fell into the claws of the American dream. Jen keeps the family drama in the novel unresolved as it ends abruptly and provides scope to the readers to ponder upon the changes of the characters, thus welcoming more possibilities of alternative beings. The sequel written at the time, when multiculturalism was at its peak in America, allowed Jen to explore more possibilities of assimilation paving the path for variations in the expression of one's self. Jen, through the family narrative draws on the conflict between the ideologies of two generation. It allows the readers to understand the perceptual difference between first generation immigrants who are directly connected to their native land and the second generation immigrants, though being the inheritors of their native culture are born into the culture of the host country. While her parents exhibit certain reservations, Mona, their daughter, seem to be more embracing of the changes that America offers them. Mona, apart from being a Chinese later transformed herself to Jew, is also an American. Therefore, she engaged herself in learning the ways of the American world through the smallest of actions including attending the church. This effort of Mona in assimilating into a new culture and then choosing a religion of her own can also be considered to be an effort in overcoming the prejudices associated with an immigrant family. Thus, only conjectures can be made and it can go on endlessly. The other three writers deal more with the pangs of being a refugee. Role of memory is very crucial to the writers of the war narratives as well as the immigrant writers who has the backdrop of their work based on any kind of conflict.

These writers, apart from Hayslip foreground the significance of writing fiction, entwined with their traumatic past, which gives them more freedom to explore their past through fictional characters. All the Vietnamese American writers, foregrounds the shifting definition of war, rather than adhering to the same definition of the past. War, undoubtedly, is a universal phenomenon which creates refugees and displacement and these writers shifts the understanding of these processes and categories created by war. They pave the path of hope and possibility through their traumatic past. All the Asian Diaspora writers discussed above deal with a state of exile, either voluntary or forced. The difference in the Diasporic predicaments is seen through the comparative study which shall hinder any tendency of homogenizing the Diaspora life of people across the world. The study aligns with the truth of the existence of multiple selves which are fluid and ever changing. These selves are constructed and negotiated in the modern and post modern social contexts through a host of activities and identities. This meditation on one's self also paves the path for the parallel notions of agency, subject and personhood. Further, question arises if a certain degree of coherence, unity and universality underlying the notion of 'self' can be multiple and varied.

Despite the existing differences between the writers based on their personal background, narrative style, themes of their works, there exists commonality between them. All of them, in their own time and space endeavoured to make sense of their displacement and their Diaspora selves in their own ways. Above all, they share the commonality of being a critic rather than just being a novelist weaving fictional tales. All the writers despite belonging to the same category of Asian Diaspora writers foregrounds their individual process of narration of the Diaspora self formation.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

“Sometimes what you think is an end is only a beginning.”

- Agatha Christie

Conclusions are powerful for providing a comprehensive understanding of the previous chapters. In the discussion of the syntax or the formation of the Self in the Diaspora, the challenge arises in bringing the discussion to a halt. The perfect point to halt is often challenging. Though conclusions might inherently seem to be conclusive, it also foregrounds the arenas which were not included in the discussion. The discussion on Diaspora selves in the select Asian Diaspora narratives is a vast arena to be explored. For the dissertation, Vietnamese American narratives and Chinese American narratives were selected owing to the scope of discussion that the study would allow. Differing in space and time, the Diaspora narratives of these two nations allowed enough scope for an understanding of Diaspora selves. The concluding chapter of this dissertation shall foreground the significance for alternative avenues of research of the formation of Diaspora selves. The ability to perceive the entire work in a comprehensive manner is crucial to the conclusion. An attempt will be made to draw conclusions, keeping in consideration all the previous chapters.

The Vietnamese American writers and the Chinese American writer selected for the study foregrounds the role of history and memory in the formation of the Diaspora selves. For the Vietnamese American writers, the Vietnam War is crucial and forms the foundation on which the entire events are based. History is crucial to their understanding of themselves and their entire process of displacement. Memory, for them is significant in revisiting their past years later and reimagining it. The writers, through their semi autobiographical works, rewrites their self, a process through which one's past and one's self is figured anew through interpretation. An exploration of the most elusive being which we call “self” foregrounds multiple ways of perceiving it.

The dissertation titled *Syntax of the Self: A study of select Chinese and Vietnamese Diaspora writings* primarily focused on the formation of self in an alien land after the process of

displacement. However, this formation of self is not a sudden change in the self, but is a gradual evolution of the self. Therefore, the history of events that led to the displacement is crucial to understand the origin of the self and the reason behind the immigration.

The past is inevitable in the comprehension of the present and hence, the history of the creation of Diasporas across the world shall provide an insight into the understanding of the reasons behind human movement across borders since time immemorial. The introductory chapter of the dissertation foregrounds the history of the creation of Diasporas, beginning with its theological connotations and then foregrounds the widely accepted distinctive features that characterize the Diaspora predicament.

The next chapter foregrounded the dynamics of the self through the works of the Chinese American writer Gish Jen who traced the evolution of the self of the characters through the lens of post colonial and post modern concepts. For Gish Jen, a second generation immigrant, the concept of self entails multiple possibilities of expression. Her novel, *Typical American*, traces the story of the Chinese immigrant, Ralph Chang's journey into the new world. Jen however, challenges the notion of model minority, as Ralph refrained from assimilating into the American culture, but ended up being one of them. Jen, in the novel allows the readers for multiple interpretations by refraining from jumping into conclusions. The sequel, *Mona in the Promised Land*, however is much more expressive. Jen in the novel indulges in the free play of identity and foregrounds the fluidity of ethnicity. She foregrounds the impermanence of culturally bestowed identifications and prioritizes individual expression over cultural obligations. However it is noteworthy that, though Jen portrays Mona as all embracing, she never depicts her characters as alienating themselves from their own native culture. The native culture seems to be dormant in them. Being overpowered by the culture of the host country, they find themselves aligning with the American culture. Expression of their selves is moulded by the external influences. Time and place are significant factors in Jen's novels. Ralph Chang and his wife in the first novel clung on to their old world ideas but eventually dreamt of the American dream of self invention. With sharp characterizations and skillful twists, Jen's humor adds to the brilliance of the novel. The sequel, *Mona in the Promised Land*, traces the story of Ralph's daughter Mona and was set in the late 90s America when multiculturalism was at its peak. Therefore, one can witness fluidity in religion and ethnicity where Mona embraces a liberated sense of self that

transcends the physical and psychic boundaries. Jen's immigrant stories are, therefore, hopeful and emanate positivity.

The evolution of self through more tragic and traumatic circumstances can be witnessed in the war narratives of Thanhha Lai and Le Thi Diem Thuy which were discussed in Chapter III. The kind of selves that these writers talk about bears the scars of the traumatic past. The protagonist of their works who survived the traumatic Vietnam War fought a double edged battle of confronting their past and also carved for themselves a niche in the new world. It is noteworthy that both the writers present the hardships of the lives of refugees through the lens of the refugees themselves. Both the novels are success stories of refugees paving their path in the new world. However, their success stories unveil intense pain and trauma. The child narrators in the novels matured with time and eventually made peace with their status as a refugee. Both the writers delve deep into the emotional state of the characters and foreground their conflicted state of mind.

Much more intimate experience of the plight of the refugees is gained through Le Ly Hayslip's war memoirs which were discussed in chapter IV. Written with unflinching honesty and clarity, Le Ly's memoir foregrounds the formation of her own self, hence autobiographical. Hayslip's memoirs embody a sense of ownership as well as agency. Hayslip, in her memoir presents the understanding of the Vietnam War through the lens of the Vietnamese survivors, she being one of them. Hayslip was born into war and thus grew up with the war. Hayslip in her works, traces the evolution of her self through the trauma, fostering hope and peace in the future to come.

All the writers trace the quintessential journey of 'becoming' marked by recreations, reimaginings and reiterations. A number of processes are in work in this process of becoming. All these processes are instrumental to the formation of Diaspora selves, though the pattern might differ. The certain aspects of the self are organized in different patterns, thus leading to the formations of self that differs from one another. Such aspects are variables that can take different values in the dynamic constitution of a self. Thus, there exists a different variation in the pattern of the aspects that constitutes the self. Question arises if there lies a hierarchical relation among these aspects. Further, it would be illogical to claim that a single aspect can be sufficient to constitute a self, thus eliminating any chances of creation of varied and multiple selves. Therefore, the arrangement of the aspects of the self in a certain patterns shall embody all the varying Diaspora selves that might be created in the process.

Taking this perspective into consideration, shall open up possibilities of multiple interpretations in the post modern context of being. Further, various interpretations of selves is considered to be compatible instead of perceiving self through rigid binary oppositions. A relation between various aspects of the self can be drawn when a comparative study of the works is undertaken.

The dissertation particularly aimed to interpret and analyze this formation of self. However, all the works discussed in the dissertation, except for the memoirs are semi autobiographical in nature. Therefore, there arises question regarding the language and the mode of expression of the thoughts. It is undoubtedly true that autobiographical texts cannot reveal the past exactly as “it was”. Instead, the writer, after years, in a way narrates how their present self came into being because of the past events. The history one tells, through memory, assumes the form of a narrative that charts the individual’s process of the development of the self. All the writers discussed in the dissertation focuses on this gradual evolution of self and the process of becoming that an immigrant or a refugee undergo. It is noteworthy that, the writers foreground an internal journey of the characters. A gradual evolution in the formation of self is seen in all the immigrants who are displaced from their native land and displacement of any sort, undoubtedly leads to long lasting effects.

While discussing about the Self, question arises regarding the obscure function of language. In the recollection of the past, through the eyes of the present, there exist possibilities of fanciful imaginations. Further, at times, the autobiographical act turns out to be a mode of understanding one’s present in the light of the past events. There might exist a disjunction between the life lived and the life written. The past exists in the present in the form of memory and the present can never be understood independent of the past. The past comes into play in the very act of interpreting the present experiences and attributing meaning to it.

Therefore, undertaking the project of writing an autobiography is a challenge in itself. Writing an autobiography years later raises concern regarding the scope of fanciful imaginations while painting one’s childhood experiences. These are certain realizations that strike the mind while describing the autobiographical act of writing. The writers here deconstruct the very idea of Self, particularly Diaspora selves. Question arises if the self is merely imaginary, a notion of our being, created through myriad of imaginations. However, Descartes’s belief of every deed being attributed to a doer, asserts significance of agency and physicality of the self. Agency is crucial to the understanding of personhood and self as a being.

It is noteworthy that, in the recollection of the past, language helps in the creation of an integrated reality. Language helps us to capture the reality in all its multiplicity and changeability as reality is constituted inside language and culture and therefore, language is crucial to the representation of reality. The entire idea of rewriting oneself is a challenging one. Memory is crucial to this process and also possesses a challenge to the effort of representing things as they were. It can be argued that the moment when we try to interpret our former experiences, which is more than mere recollection, we end up imagining and thus fictionalizing the past events. Memory, thus can confer a new meaning and significance to one's previous experiences. In this case, the manner in which we remember is more important than what we remember. Another unavoidable problem of the process of rewriting the past is that only a version of the past which existed can be rewritten. Thinking along the lines of the Aristotle's theory of art, question arises if the act of rewriting will be considered to be removed from reality. In contrast to the autobiographical act, fiction relies upon imagination to pause and reflect upon the events of the past.

The dissertation deals with the process of becoming, which can be argued to be continuously deferred. The process of understanding oneself or becoming someone is never final and is the very characteristic of life. Just like language does not guarantee any finality of meaning, similarly the very idea of the formation of self does not arrive at an end after which no change is possible. This can be analyzed through Derrida's idea of 'différance'. Drawing on Saussure's idea of signification based on differences, Derrida takes a step further and includes the idea of deferral in understanding differences. Based on this, he propounds his idea of 'différance' which is based on the idea of differences as well as deferral. It is noteworthy that differences are crucial to the process of meaning making. Derrida's idea of deferral focuses on the postponement of meaning and foregrounds a possibility of free play of meaning. The idea of 'différance' undermines the unity and the coherence of text and simultaneously refers to differ and to defer.

The desire to seek stability and a final meaning is a part of human nature. However, the writers here challenge this effort of arriving at a centre. Apart from being a part of human nature, this desire of settling somewhere might also be a function of culture. Delving deep into it unveils the deferring nature of language as well as the meaning making process. Thinking along the lines of Derrida's critical tradition, it can be argued that the writers selected for the

study challenges the notion of arriving at a simplified conclusion and drawing a final meaning of self in the Diaspora predicament.

It is noteworthy that the writers end their work, leaving the readers with indeterminate reasons to ponder upon. When viewed through the lens of reader response critics, the readers are bestowed upon with the responsibility of deriving meaning from the texts. Much is depended on the role of the readers in actively constructing the texts rather than passively consuming them. Gish Jen's novels, particularly the second one, *Mona in the Promised Land* ends on an uncertain note of ethnic fluidity and the heterogeneous identity of Mona's daughter , Io. Readers are left with endless conjectures on the reasons behind their multiple identities and the future prospects. Similarly Le Thi Diem Thuy's novel, *The Gangster We are all Looking For*, ends on an uncertain longing for the past which is embodied in their struggle to find a voice in the new land. However, there is no end to the exhaustive set of reasons that could be articulated for their nature of being, thus allowing the readers to reach their own conclusions. From Gish Jen to Thanhha Lai and Le Thi Diem Thuy, they seemingly end their narrative with a possibility of hope. Their endings are, actually beginnings in disguise, which triggers the mind of the readers to ponder on the kind of self anticipated by the writer and come up with more possibilities. They defer the possibility of the arrival of a final understanding of self which would restrict itself to one single definition. This can be compared to a mirage which provides the readers with an illusion of arrival at the final meaning, which, when keenly observed, is further deferred. The writers here foreground a heterogeneous self which is continuously evolving. The term 'heterogeneous' here bears positive implications of possibilities of constitution of a liberated self which can perform multiple identities and yet maintain its integrity. The Vietnamese American writers selected, instead of foregrounding solely a divided self, later on with its evolution, moves towards the constitution of a heterogeneous self which is malleable and liberated. It is to be noted that, Gish Jen ends the novels in a manner that gives rise to endless speculations and conjectures, thus inviting interpretations from the readers. Following Derrida's notion of lack of a centre, it can be argued that Jen's novels fail to arrive at a final meaning which would have allowed the senses and the speculations to rest. Her texts, can be argued to be a heterogeneous conglomeration of multiple possibilities.

It is also noteworthy that an attribute of interdependency underlies the formation of self in the texts. The individuals, though regarded as complete entities in themselves are part of a larger structure which cannot be overlooked. The essence of the belief of the structuralists

that things cannot be understood in isolation as they are a part of a larger structure is crucial to the understanding of Diaspora selves. Social, cultural and psychological structures are implicit structures which are constantly in work during the entire process of becoming. For Hayslip, the genre of memoir plays a significant role in presenting to the readers Hayslip's version of her self. Hayslip's narrative structure contains her understanding of self. However the very nature of the self too is subjected to larger structure. The war narratives discussed in the work foregrounds the role of Vietnam War in the survivor's understanding of them as 'refugees'. Later on after their displacement, the culture and the social structures of their host country is instrumental in their understanding of their displaced selves. Gish Jen's protagonists are seen to be subjected to the way of life in America, and they make efforts in shaping themselves accordingly. Thus, Jen fosters an interdependent self in her writings.

It is also noteworthy to draw our attention towards the issue of refugees discussed in the works of the three Vietnamese American writers. They based their works on the prior experiences of the Vietnam War. It appears that there is something inescapable about this desire of theirs to tell their story. However, question arises if they resort to the conviction in order and the possibility for discovering meaning. In Hayslip's memoirs, the writer can be seen to be engaged in an effort of discovering answers to certain questions which, in turn are triggered by events of the past. Therefore, the effort to unravel the meaning of the history itself involves own interpretation, which is considered to be the very nature of memoirs. Imagination comes into play in the effort of binding facts together and making meaning out of it. The efforts geared towards unraveling the truth of the past demands more than mere recollection.

It is noteworthy that these refugee writers were initially haunted by a sense of loss and a need to reclaim the past. Even if they look back, their physical alienation would hinder their reclamation of the past which, in Rushdie's words is only possible through the creation of imaginary homelands. Fiction serves this purpose of the displaced writers to reconnect with their homeland and perhaps imagine their past in the way they would have preferred it to be. All categories of different displaced people including the refugees and the immigrants are generally perceived to be straddling two cultures. But in reality as Viet Thanh Nguyen said, they live in two time zones and two separate histories. There is much more to understand of them rather than just the difference in space and culture. The need to perceive refugees in a different light rather than mere voiceless and homeless people underlies the works discussed. The writers established new notion of refugees as paragons of strength, courage and victory.

The Asian writers discussed in the study also raise prominent questions regarding the construction of Asians as a racial category in America. From foregrounding the Vietnamese beliefs in afterlife and the Chinese Confucian ideals, the writers raised the significance of agency and ownership through their writings. In the face of racism, they guard against the essentializing tendencies that their native culture might be subjected to. It is noteworthy that, all the writers strike a balance between their native beliefs and ideals and the American way of life.

Diaspora literature, thus deals with a range of displaced community of people who moved because of variegated reasons and thus, their Diaspora predicament cannot be homogenized. The Diasporas discussed here, not only evoke trauma, fear and dislocation but also are harbingers of hope and beginnings. Change and evolution is inherent to the understanding of all the Diaspora selves. For the writers discussed here, they resist any strict understanding of self. Instead, they portray the self in a continuous flux which is malleable and flexible. Though the generally accepted features of Diaspora self including nostalgia, homesickness cannot be overlooked, yet these are not the only parameters to understand the constitution of the self of a displaced person. The Diaspora selves of the displaced people, as depicted in the texts are more empowered than their earlier selves. It is crucial to understand the formation of self as a continuum subjected to constant change and reformation. The writers foreground a heterogeneous perspective of the self rather than just a self divided between two cultures. Though initially, the immigrants are trapped between two cultures, eventually they work towards establishing identity or a semblance of identity through the differences. Instead of drawing stark opposition between the earlier self and the present self, it is significant to comprehend the present self as a modified version of the earlier self. Placed within the larger structures, a refashioning of the earlier self takes place. However, the refashioned self cannot be considered as the final one because change is inherent to human nature, thus keeping in mind the possibilities of further changes. Scholars are left to ponder upon the nature of self to be a pre-given reality or a result of the discursive processes which constitutes reality. Whether the understanding of self is embedded in the material and cultural practices of everyday life indeed paves the path for never-ending speculations. Nevertheless, migration is a global phenomenon and tells the tales of human aspiration and survival. It is the need of the hour to delve deep into the concerns raised by migration across the world, some of which have been initiated in the study.

Asian Diaspora literature is a vast sea with much more to explore. It must be mentioned that the profundity and the vastness of Asian Diaspora literature welcomes multiple interpretations and further research. The Dissertation is only a small effort to initiate a serious discussion in the academia to ponder on the nature and constitution of Diaspora self thus paving the path for future research. The magnitude of the seemingly simple notion of “selves” in exile cannot be perceived in a comprehensive manner through the study of a limited number of texts. The texts selected here, were considered only to be emblematic of the larger world of exile and displacement. Therefore, without restricting the discussion on Diaspora selves to a limited number of aspects, the study aims at triggering the mind of the readers to ponder upon the numerous other aspects and dimensions of Diaspora selves, which are left untouched. Further critical readings on the topic would evoke better perspectives. Echoing Agatha Christie’s words, perhaps this end shall pave the way for a beginning of novel insight into the world of refugees and immigrants.

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