DECOLONIZING RACE AND GENDER?: A STUDY OF SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORIC POETRY

BY

ROSHAN AMBER ALI

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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ROSHAN AMBER ALI

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Name of Discipline

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan _____

Name of Research Supervisor Signature of Research Supervisor

Dr. Muhammad Uzair _____

Name of Dean (FAH) Signature of Dean (FAH)

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Safeer Awan _____

Name of Pro-Rector Academics Signature of Pro-Rector Academics

_____

Date

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I Roshan Amber Ali

Daughter of Riaz Ahmad Malik

Registration # 1593-MPhil/ELit-F18

Discipline English Literature

Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Decolonizing Race and Gender?: A Study of Selected South Asian Diasporic Poetry** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Decolonize Race and Gender?: A Study of Selected South Asian Diasporic Poetry

This research aims to explore the different themes through which South Asian writers in diaspora attempt decolonize race and gender in selected poetry. Literary practices of South Asian women play a significant role in their contribution to feminist discourse and their written experiences reflect on how feminism is practiced and perceived by brown women in diaspora. Such form feminism and feminist practices emerge from an intersectional approach to gender and race. The poetry selected for analysis is taken from the works of Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah-Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha who are second generation immigrant women from South Asia. The researcher uses theoretical frameworks provided by Chandra Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* and Sara Suleri's *Women Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition* to analyze the themes in selected poetry. The researcher uses the framework to determine the role of race in postcolonialism as well as South Asian feminisms. This study considers the main factors that contribute to presentation of racial and feminist experiences in South Asian diaspora in North America. Aspects of racism, classism, misogyny and oppression are common issues addressed in the themes. These themes are also scrutinized through the repetition of binaries, uneasiness of immigrants in identity formations and generalizations made through autobiographical depiction of their experiences in their poetry. This research also explores various elements of South Asian feminism that can be found in contemporary literature and theory but were marginalized in Western colonial and phallocentric historical discourse.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Race, Gender, Feminism, Decolonization.

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To my mother, Hamda Riaz Malik, who took on the role of my father and also became my best friend. She brought me up exactly the way she wanted, against all odds. I would never want it to be any other way. Whenever I was rebellious or stubborn, she'd simply threaten me by saying she'd pull me out of school. So I took her threat to heart, stayed in school and here I am.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"It is we sinful women
while those who sell the harvests of our bodies
become exalted
become distinguished
become the just princes of the material world."
(Kishwar Naheed)[1]

1.1 Introduction

Contemporary history of South Asia is immensely influenced by the colonial rule. Over the past hundred years, South Asian norms and values have been affected racial experiences and gender norms mostly due to imperialism. Pre-colonial South Asian ideologies were challenged by colonizers in the guise of civilization missions. Colonial authorities justified their control over colonized countries by making them believe that white people were superior and more civilized than people of color. They created systems of oppression based on racial superiority of white supremacy. Even in present South Asian societies, lighter skin tones are considered inherently better than darker skin tones. Furthermore, to strengthen their power in South Asia, colonizers encouraged patriarchal values of hierarchy and authority. Women of color had to struggle against the domination of white colonizers along with patriarchal control of men. The departure of colonizers left long lasting after-effects which are studied under the umbrella of postcolonialism. At a larger scale, postcolonial influences can be found in political, economic, cultural and social systems. But these influences have also deeply affected South Asians as community and as individuals. The two aspects that are focused in this research study are race and gender, particularly in the context of postcolonialism. This is an intersectional approach to postcolonialism and feminism. The term and idea of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw who highlighted the impact of various forms of inequality and discrimination that simultaneously affect the identity of an individual. Gender, race,

[1] Naheed, Kishwar. *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry (with original Urdu poems)*. Translated by Rukhsana Ahmad, The Women's Press Ltd, London, 1991.

class, sexuality and/or immigrant status all run parallel to each other and become contributing factors of oppression (UN Women).

Postcolonial perceptions of race and gender continuously impact the daily lives of South Asians, even in situations where people have left their homeland and immigrated to other countries. When people leave their country, either by force or by choice, they become a part of diasporic communities. Diaspora can be defined as the background and experience of migration that shapes the sense of identity and belonging of the migrants or their descendants (Sironi, et al. 49). People in diaspora share common ground rooted in their mutual experiences and history which shapes their identities in similar ways (49). Many immigrant women share common experiences of discrimination on the basis of race and gender similar in nature to colonial prejudices. Such experiences have been expressed by many South Asian writers in diaspora. It provides insight to the way an individual is divided between homes: of origin, and of residence. This study focuses on poetry written by South Asian women who are second generation immigrants in North America. The selected poets include Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. They have not personally experienced colonialism but their work presents postcolonial themes related to both race and gender.

The poets talk about struggles of South Asian women through their own experiences, experiences of their parents and common experiences of women of color. Themes and issues related to their race, culture, class and gender play a crucial role.

Abundant literature was produced by similar diasporic writers addressing similar issues. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Nadeem Aslam, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bapsi Sidhwa, Michael Ondaatje, V.S. Naipaul, Arundhati Roy, Muhammad Hanif, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid and Tahmima Anam are some of the South Asian diasporic writers who gained international acclaim for their work. Many South Asian writers highlighted realities of diaspora and its influence ranging from individual to generations (Chambers).

Poetry written in English by South Asian women in diaspora is sparse in comparison to prose and fiction. Although feminist themes are not uncommon in South Asian literature but it is not as popular or even accessible as its Western equivalent—mostly white, middle class—feminist literature. Western literature and

theory limit define feminism in terms of the experiences of white women. A great amount of work is being done on "women in developing countries" but this does provide sufficient body of knowledge about Eastern and South Asian feminism. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kumari Jaya Wardena wrote about Asian movements of Feminism. She defined it as "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system" (Jaya Wardena 2).

But the attention given to Western feminism is undeniable. It is considered the mainstream benchmark which places racial and postcolonial feminisms in the background. African women realized inadequacy of Western feminism as they recognize the significance of their history, struggle, race, ethnicity and culture in their feminist ideologies. Movements like Black Feminism and Africana Womanism have allowed these women to exercise their rights as female women of color within their specific and personal context.

Similarly, contemporary writers and theorists are incorporating their own feminist ideologies in South Asian contexts. It originated in reaction to Western feminism and colonialism, but now it has become significant on its own. Writers like Gayatri Spivak have written canonical texts like "Can the Subaltern Speak" foregrounding critical issues of imperialism and feminism. The researcher has selected theoretical frameworks by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Suleri evaluate Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha's poetry because both critics discuss substantial concerns in postcolonial feminism. Mohanty focuses on the importance of decolonizing feminism, race and capitalism with respect colonial history of South Asia. Suleri highlights the problems with this approach when postcolonialism is overlapped with feminism. Overall, the conceptual framework used in this study focuses on both race and gender in feminism from Mohanty and Suleri's perspective while analyzing poetry of South Asian women in diaspora.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Contemporary academic studies of literature and culture acknowledge contributing factors of race and gender that play a crucial role in distinguishing postcolonial feminist experience from its Western white counterpart. Dominance of

Western essentialist discourse shaped through colonial rule over various parts of the world gives secondary importance to women of color, their voice, struggles and experiences. As a response of Western feminism, South Asian feminisms emerged with their own discourse of resistance aiming to "decolonize" racial, class and gender issues. Oftentimes, these issues are highlighted through themes in poetry written by South Asian women in diaspora. But it also creates the issue of focus where repetition of colonial and patriarchal binaries lead to misrepresentation of the exact issue the writer is trying to address. The selected poets seem to simultaneously engage with indigenous experiences of South Asian diasporic women and transcend the essentialist definitions of race and gender.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the selected poets engage with the marginalized feminist experiences of South Asian diasporic women?

2. In what ways do the selected poets transcend the binaristic race and gender categories in their works?

1.4 Research Methodology

The researcher conducts thematic analysis of selected poems of Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Lakshmi. The analysis is conducted in light of theoretical frameworks presented by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* and Sara Suleri in *Women Skin Deep*. The selected poems are from one book per poet i.e. Rupi Kaur's *the sun and her flowers*, Fatimah Asghar's *When They Come for Us* and Leah Lakshmi's *Bodymap*.

1.4.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides insight from two different perspectives of postcolonial feminism and race. On one hand, Chandra Mohanty discusses the importance of decolonization while considering aspects of race and capitalism in South Asian women's experiences. On the other hand, Sara Suleri reflects on issues of postcolonial condition and feminism when the aspect of race is also included.

1.4.1.1 Chandra Mohanty's Theoretical Lens

The first part of this theoretical framework is based on Chandra Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Mohanty proposed the notion of *Decolonization, Anticapitalist Critique, and Feminist Commitments,* based on significance of power struggles regarding social and economic justice in the context of postcolonialism. Mohanty explains this through aspects of feminism, capitalism, racism and imperialism. Firstly, she establishes concepts of boundaries and borders that emerged during and after British colonialism (Mohanty 1). For women in postcolonial nations like India, these borders indicate external control where they struggle to save their honor, seek refuge, and protect their physical and domestic spaces. Secondly, Mohanty elaborates the potential of decolonization (1-2). She suggests a decolonized form of feminism that is free from exclusions and silences created by colonial boundaries. It investigates tensions between coexisting plurality and narrowing of borders along with the potential freedom beyond these borders in everyday life. This form of feminism acknowledges conflicts of coexisting plurality and narrowing borders along with associated fears and restrictions (2).

Furthermore, Mohanty talks about political consequences of existence of women which leads to discrimination on the basis of privilege, social marginality and financial position. Acknowledgment of the underlying racism, sexism, heterosexism, and misogyny in political and social institutions in power is important to understand behind these biases. Social fabric contains interconnected processes of misogyny, sexism, heterosexism and racism. This can be observed in relation to capitalist consumerism and ethnic nationalism along with politics. She emphasizes on the importance to critique these institutions, behaviors and interpersonal politics involved in these interconnected structures, especially for the establishment of inclusive and impartial feminist politics (3).

These reasons led to Mohanty's framework of anti-capitalist and anti-racist critique rooted in decolonization and solidarity. The mentioned solidarity is based on social realities beyond metaphorical concepts of sisterhood or sense of shared identity. It is both a political and an ethical goal. To the core, Mohanty's feminist ideology can be described as a "pro-sex and -woman" world-view, where both genders can freely

and safely live their lives, with physical health and self-respect; with the liberty to choose whoever they want to love and live with, to have or not have children; not just to make decisions under obligation, but with pleasure and imagination to explore the mind; with financial stability, racial impartiality, environmental sustainability, and restructuring of capital to form material foundation of human welfare (3). Strategically, this vision involves democratic, anti-racist and feminist contributions on multiple levels to unite against exploitive ruling systems. This includes consideration of all kinds of small or large scale struggles and actions as a part of a larger-scale radical change. So, feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-racist actions in everyday life matter as much as organized political movements on a large scale (4). So, there are multiple levels of feminist practice: the level of everyday life actions that comprise our relationships, communities, and individual identities; the collective level of acting in a group, network, and actions based on feminist ideas of social chance; and the level of academia, theory, and textual ingenuity of feminists involved in intellectual and written creation of knowledge (5).

There are certain principles and practices that Mohanty considers problematic particularly in U.S.-based feminisms making it difficult for Third World women to practice. Firstly, feminist theory and movements are mostly classist and focus on career advancements through academic scholarship instead of addressing essential social and economic issues of feminism. Consequently, there is a gap between specific and personal comprehension of feminism and theoretical, shared feminist vision concentrated on everyday life actions that can be radically transformed. Secondly, U.S. culture of corporatization is growing to the extent of naturalization of capitalist ideals. It focuses on the advancement of women in a neoliberal and consumerist manner. The idea of socio-economic equality is rooted in capitalist standards of accumulation, competition and profit. Ultimately, the critique of hegemonic post-modernist cynicism and political essentialism of identity has resulted in reduction of feminist politics and theory due to which independent and exclusionary comprehension of identity dominate, or identity (national, sexual, racial, class etc.) is considered simply ‘strategic’ and unstable. Therefore, identity is regarded as immaterial or naïve instead of being a foundation for liberal mobilization and a source of knowledge (6).

Mohanty explains her meaning of solidarity in terms of decolonization of knowledge and anti-capitalist critique in pursuit of mutuality, accountability and acknowledgement of common interests. Solidarity focuses on working together instead of enforcing shared aims against oppression. It builds alliances while acknowledging, not erasing, difference and diversity (7). Mohanty incorporates Dean's notion of "reflective solidarity" which is an inclusive ideal of solidarity by understanding a unified *we*. It is reconstructed through the thematization of "third voice" as opposed to the concept of *us vs. them* (qtd. in Mohanty 7).

These specific genealogies of feminism have also influenced much of Mohanty's work. In collaboration with Jacqui Alexander, Mohanty has written about the importance of decolonization in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle of feminism. They discussed the focus on basic practices of decolonization as individually spontaneous, combined effort in self-transformation, political mobilization and reformation of identity. They claimed that memory, emotion, history and affectional relations are important parts of cognition that help build self-reflective, critical, feminist individuals. The identities formed after all these practices result in reevaluating structures of colonialization, patriarchy, heterosexuality, racism, and capitalism in pursuit of feminism. The vision of such a democracy of collective benefits includes governmental politics of sexuality that are central in consideration of resistance rooted in women's daily lives. Creation of decolonization where independence and individual willpower are focused in pursuit of freedom, can only be attained through the combined practice of individual spontaneity (8).

Furthermore, Mohanty's *anticapitalist critique* focuses on two aspects. The first aspect is pointing out and interpreting the impact of global capitalism in daily lives. The second aspect clarifies the conflict between feminist visions of socioeconomic justice and capitalism. Her critique inclines towards a racialized socialist approach of feminism that addresses major issues of national and cultural interconnections of sexuality in the context of capitalist pursuits like domination, accumulation and profit. This includes critique of the process, discourse and principles of capitalism along with its naturalization through corporate culture and neoliberal ideology. It involves comprehension of feminist practices from anti-imperialist perspective along with analysis of how global capitalism enables U.S. and Eurocentrism in addition to nativism and anti-immigrant sentiments (9).

Overall, two major interlinked themes of Mohanty's work are decolonizing feminism and demystifying capitalism. Both of these themes raise questions about identity, experience, and feminist struggle (9). In pursuit of "Reorienting Feminism", she is concerned with the role of gender in racial, class and national constructs of globalization. It focuses on politics of difference, challenges of solidarity; revealing power mechanisms and tactics of resistance; rethinking individual and collective identities through decolonization and politicization of knowledge; development of ethics beyond borders of race, sex, class or nation; and ultimately theorizing and practicing democratic and anti-capitalist critique (10).

In general, colonialism has shaped almost everything in its surroundings ranging from political and economic hierarchies to construction of Third World specific cultural discourse (18). The analysis of Western feminism and its political policies depict its misrepresentation and limitation of partnerships between predominantly White Western feminists, feminists of color, and working-class feminists all over the world. Production of feminist knowledge alone is not enough but it is also essential to create a scholarly link between feminism in academia and in politics, which consequently regulates the status of Western feminist literature in Third World. This is a means to intervene in specific discourses of hegemony (18-19).

In the Third World, women are categorized as sexually oppressed by Eurocentric standards. This particular model for feminist analysis this factor through homogenization and systemizations of diverse groups of women, all over the world. As Michel Focault argues that power can be perceived in the background of resistance, theoretical analysis is limited while reinforcing Imperialistic culture of the West. This is because this feminist analysis, in the background of power balance between the First and Third World, propagates and maintains ideological hegemony of Western superiority. It produces universal images of Third World women as a virtuous virgin, veiled woman, compliant wife, powerful matriarch, etc. These images contribute in the development of colonialist discourse that imposes a specific power which maintains, encodes, and determines premeditated links between the First and Third world (40-41).

Feminist analysis acknowledges the importance of recalling and rewriting history which is important in order to amend erasures, gaps, and misconceptions of

male-centered hegemony in history. This recalling and rewriting of history results in development of self-identity and political awareness. Writing provides that framework where they can develop a new political identity. It provides a platform to challenge reality. In this light, writing is considered a discursive creation that permits one to produce knowledge and propagate this particular awareness.

Mohanty's critique contains three fundamental principles of analysis of Third World women in the light of existing (Western) feminist discourse. The first assumption is to emphasize on a position of the group of "women" in light of the background of analysis, which can be anything from media representations to familial structures and organization of labor. Here women already comprise a coherent group with similar interests, irrespective of racial, ethnic, or class division, or oppositions, indicating the idea of sexual or gender difference or even universal and cross-cultural patriarchy. The second assumption for analysis becomes apparent in validity of evidence about cross-culture and universality at the methodological level. The third analytical assumption is more political in terms of understanding power and struggle. In this regard, Mohanty provides two frames of examination as mentioned above, a standardized ideology with the assumption of oppression of this group of women. This subsequently constructs the image of an average woman in the Third World who leads a fundamentally restricted life on the basis of being a woman (i.e. sexually inhibited) in the Third World (i.e. poor, domestic, illiterate, family-oriented, oblivious, maltreated, etc.). This image directly opposes representation of a modern, literature, independent (sexually and physically), and liberal Western woman (20-22).

Moving on from essentialist ideologies, Chandra Mohanty looks at feminist struggles of the Third World from the perspective of imagined community, instead of biological or cultural cooperation, where the foundation is on political grounds. The way we think about gender, class and race builds a base for these struggles and their political associations, not just color or sex (46). In the Third World, *Feminism* itself is subjected to speculation. One must understand the ways in which various historical and sociocultural positions of women develop their connection with feminism, prior to the concern of historical and structural constraints specific politics of Third World women (49). Narrative of Third World women is not markedly decentralizing historical and subjective histories through its existence. Interpretation, comprehension and institutional location of these narratives are the objects of utmost significance.

Ultimately, the fundamental goal is not mere awareness or to simply record one's history of struggle. Its impact lies in an imaginative way of recording these experiences; how they are read, received, and distributed (Mohanty "Cartographies of Struggle", 77-78)

1.4.1.2 Sara Suleri's Theoretical Lens

In *Women Skin Deep*, Sara Suleri presents a different proposition in contrast to Mohanty. Suleri highlights the issues of academic evaluations related to race and postcolonial feminism. She says that there is a need to revise cultural and literary analyses of marginal groups because of the existing conflict between "multiculturalism" in mass media and "thought police" in academia. Attention of the media towards the academy is a result of mass cultural reading. It is necessary to translate otherness or criticize culture where the *real world* contradicts the academy. Furthermore, Suleri critiques "simplistic binarisms" by questioning boundaries of its culture and its obsoleteness in terms of "us and them" that consequently influences the formation of identity (Suleri 756).

She explains issues of marginalized groups that are reduced to stereotypes expressed through binaries. Academic and literary works largely focus on self-censorship in terms of political correctness. This is associated with scholarly allegiances of postcolonial identity, gender, queer studies and ultimately, the body. Thus, Suleri considers academic discourse as non-inclusive in its current form due to its subcultural and subtextual morals (Suleri 757).

Suleri suggests a two-tiered methodological approach as a response. The first response suggests establishment of alternative discourse and viewpoints as tools to analyze identities. The second response is the one Suleri elaborates in detail, in her essay. It attempts to initiate a discussion about limitations and excesses of accumulated marginal discourse, regardless of the academic approach towards the binaries of margin and center. This is because the center continues to dominate with its "untheorized and monolithic" identities. Suleri explains that if the participants of marginalized discourse begin to critically evaluate intellectual errors, the dominant position of center can diminish. (Suleri 757-8)

She aims to develop a method in which present academic discourse is separate from territorial attachments and replaced with cultural identities of marginalized groups located in different and dynamic places. Her subject focuses on a particular overlapping of the margin in theoretical junctures between gender studies and feminism. Suleri highlights the problems of contemporary feminist discourse that attaches "an uneasy selfhood" to a "postcolonial" woman's voice. This raises arguments related to identity crisis with respect to constructivism and essentialism. Here, development of a "feminist center" means to merge two margins. According to Suleri, this associates privilege to race in feminism with a suggestive moral code and historical specificity taken from presupposed postcolonial ideas. Pairing "postcolonial" with "woman" often causes oversimplification of oppression and association of *the good* to "racially female voice". This metaphor does not allow discourse to go beyond connotations of good and evil (Suleri 758-9).

In order to dismantle the status of "postcolonial feminism", Suleri gives central important to chronological priority of gender and race within reviewed marginal discourse. In the past, the term *postcolonial* denoted specific discursive practices in a specific geographical region as a result of a historic event of colonization. Presently, it has become an abstract ideological disposition in reformation of marginal discourse. Suleri incorporates James Clifford's idea of replacing figurative postcolonialism with "obsolete binarism" between the indigenous local and anthropologist. On one hand, reformation of the postcolonial grants discourse on cultural mobility. On the other hand, the metaphorical state of postcolonialism can become unstructured to abandon any region for "cultural thickness" (Suleri 759).

Keeping in mind the current feminist discourse, Suleri argues that this segment of postcolonialism must be seen as an arbitrary symbol for cultural struggles and an obsolete signifier for racial historicity. There is no clear dichotomy to categorize the process of reforming postcoloniality while simultaneously changing marginal voice of feminism or any relevant racial body. This raises the question whether body in race is a subject or object because a methodological objectification could lead to radical subjectivity (Suleri 760).

Suleri presents her critique on Chandra Mohanty's ideology in the latter's essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.* Mohanty focuses on criticizing "Third World Woman" in a specific manner. Here, the third world woman is presented in Western feminist texts as a "monolithic object" based on the idea that gender as culture and gender as history cannot be reconciled. According to Mohanty, assumption of women as an oppressed group by Western feminist texts about third world women, considers only Western feminists as *true subjects* while the status of third world women never goes beyond the *object*. Suleri presents the ethical dilemma of avoiding this particular objectivism. Here the "claim to authenticity" blocks the greater claim of "what the ethnically constructed woman" is supposed to desire (Suleri 760).

Trinh Minh-ha in *Woman, Native, Other* discusses the above-mentioned desire in detail to propose an alternative. This comprises of the representation of feminist discourse while considering both "woman" and "race" at the same time (Suleri 760). Trinh tries to reposition her gendering of ethnic facts through *postfeminism*. Suleri criticizes the use of prefix *post-* in regards to Trinh's *postfeminism*. Instead of focusing on dichotomy of race and gender, Suleri concludes that Trinh relies on biological myth that the racial body is a literal reduction of sexuality and the course of intervening theories are limited to lived experience (Suleri 761)

So, using "radical subjectivity" as a substitute for theoretical responses results in subject's objectification because lived experienced cannot be considered a credible resource to answer questions related to race in historical or theoretical contexts. "Radical subjectivity" implies subtle romanticism which makes it difficult to distinguish its significance. According to Suleri when the response to discursive practices is drawn from life, the issue of race contradicts with feminist discourse (Suleri 761-2) Postcoloniality becomes abstract where the groups of *race* and *women* become figurative narratives of oppression acting as a mirrored allegory for each other. From an ahistorical perspective, linking honor to racial body creates this metaphor of postcoloniality where it is difficult to prioritize race and gender in the writings of a woman of color. Even in different feminisms, race should not be limited to biologism or revised alternatives for exotic body. As realism often resurfaces in postcolonial feminism, signification of realism, particularly patriarchal Eurocentric

realism, in gendered race continues arbitrating between dissimilar indigenous realities and cultures (Suleri 762-3).

Furthermore, Suleri discusses proposition of "talking back" as enabling discursive readings of gendered race. In her text *Talking Back* bell hooks suggests going beyond binaristic dichotomies while simultaneously incorporating them in a rhetoric to determine who and how to address the oppressed and the oppressor. Similar to Trinh, hooks prefers subjective and personal narration of experiences in response to acculturation projected by Western theories of feminism. Establishment of a hierarchy based on race and color creates a narrative where it isolates different perspectives of race (Suleri 764).

Gendered, postcolonial feminism claims to transcend biological reading of color and race regardless of a dominant white academy and the primitive idea of whiteness. So Suleri believes that feminist intellectuals exploit their postcolonial position as minority voices and try to hide behind the North American academic term of "Third World Woman" that provides political immunity. This provokes criticism from the thought-police and also risks compartmentalization of otherness that hides behind multiculturalism (Suleri 765).

1.4.2 Method

The current study is a qualitative research which evaluates themes in the selected poems from the theoretical perspectives provided by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Suleri. Through thematic analysis, the researcher explores different aspects of postcolonial feminism.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to explore specific elements in selected poetry that are based on the conceptual framework provided by Mohanty and Suleri. Thematic analysis is renown in qualitative research. Braun and Clarke explain that this method of analysis includes identification, evaluation, categorization, explanation and commentary on the themes that are found in the text. This method is beneficial in providing a detailed and complex yet accessible study of the text (qtd in Nowell, et al. 2). It gives insight to multiple aspects of examination by highlighting similarities and differences (Braun & Clark; qtd. in Nowell, et al. 2). It is convenient

in summarizing significant features of larger texts compelling the researcher to analyze the text in a structured manner (qtd. in Nowell, et al. 2). It helps the researcher analyze the data, recognize patterns that contribute to themes, identify the themes and analyze the themes by relating them to codes from the data (qtd. in Macguire and Delahunt 3353). This method of thematic analysis follows six steps namely; familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Caulfield).

The first step of thematic analysis in this research was familiarization with the theoretical frameworks and selected poems. After this, the researcher was able to identify codes that helped generate and review themes. These themes were taken from Mohanty and Suleri's work as parts of conceptual framework. Therefore, this method can be considered as "theoretical thematic analysis", similar to what Macguire and Delahunt mention in their research (3355). The next steps of this method include reviewing, defining and naming the themes. After completing the first five steps of thematic analysis, the following two tables were made to display the themes and codes concerned in this research. Table 1 identifies various codes and generates themes from Mohanty's theoretical framework whereas Table 2 is related to Suleri's theoretical framework.

Theme: Decolonizing theory and Experiences **Codes** Remove borders defined by colonizers Beyond borders of race, class, sexuality, nationality and	**Theme: Racial Bias** **Codes** Acknowledge sexism and misogyny faced by women of color. Recognize the role of racial bias in social and political systems The ways in which	**Theme: Anti-Capitalist Critique** **Codes** Effects of economic and social marginalization on justice or privilege Underlying capitalist agendas coinciding with colonial patterns	**Theme: Feminist Practices and Solidarity** **Codes** Everyday actions of women within their communities, relationships and on an individual level Connecting with other women in social and

ethnicity Differentiating experiences from white women Identify colonial influence on history and experiences Revisions and rewriting experiences and colonial history.	race affects every day experiences of Third World women	and missions	communal groups Solidarity through common aims instead of common oppression Writing about feminist practices in theory, scholarly works or creative texts.

Table 1: Themes and codes from Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*

Theme: Simplistic Binarism **Codes**	**Theme: Uneasy Selfhood in Identity Formations** **Codes**	**Theme: Radical Subjectivity and Generalizations** **Codes**
Contemplate simplistic binarisms i.e. "us vs. them"	Question of identify formation vexing current feminist discourse	Elevating female voice into metaphor for "the good"
Obsolescence of the dichotomy between margin and center	Distinction between situated and universal knowledge	Abundant attention given to marginality
Subject/object status of racial body	Grant "uneasy selfhood" to the "postcolonial Woman" (Suleri 758)	Doubtful claim to authenticity of female racial voices
Sexuality reduced to literal structure of racial	Free-floating	Feminism turns into lived

body Attempt to speak beyond binarisms but keep returning to binarisms, clichés "Historically risky compartmentalization of otherness" (Suleri 765)	understanding and arbitrariness of "postcoloniality" Three conflicting identities: writer of color, woman writer and woman of color	experience "Radical subjectivity" turns into "love-grade romanticism" (Suleri 761) Lived experience is an insufficient alternative to Western feminist theory

Table 2: Themes and codes from Suleri's *Women Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition*

The next and final step is writing up the analysis of the data according to the above-mentioned themes. Chapter 3 analyzes selected poems according to the themes identified from Mohanty's theoretical lens. Chapter 4 uses themes selected from Suleri's theoretical framework to analyze the selected poems. This approach to thematic analysis gives better insight to the researcher to compare the two perspectives.

1.5 Organization of the Study

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this research introduces contemporary issues of race, gender and colonialism. It explains the context behind this study based on elements from colonial history that contribute to the current concerns of postcolonialism and feminism. The research aims to analyze themes related to feminist experiences of South Asian poets in diaspora. Themes to be focused in the analysis are determined through the conceptual framework based on critical works by Chandra Mohanty and Sara Suleri. The research methodology is explained in detail in this chapter. This chapter also determines the significance and rationale of this study within the present context of academic work and contemporary research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher reviews work relevant to the current study in the second chapter. The first part of this chapter focuses on origins of decolonization and its emergence in the light of colonial history of South Asia. Furthermore, it elaborates the role of race and gender in postcolonial South Asia. It presents the impact of racial and gender bias on South Asian experiences within and outside of their countries. There is special focus on the feminist works written in the past keeping in mind women of color. The researcher reviews various texts related to South Asian feminisms and explains different forms of feminism in South Asia in contrast to Western feminism. Finally, the part provides details about the poets and their work. The personal history of selected poets is described in order to understand their perspective in a better way.

TRACING THE URGE TO DECOLONIZE RACE AND GENDER IN SELECTED POETRY THROUGH CHANDRA MOHANTY'S LENS

This chapter focuses on analyzing themes of decolonization, anti-racism, anti-capitalism and feminist practices and solidarity according to the lens of Mohanty in selected texts by Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha.

EXPLORING THE NECESSITY OF DECOLONIZING RACE AND GENDER IN SELECTED POETRY THROUGH SARA SULERI'S LENS

This chapter explores themes of simplistic binarisms, uneasy selfhood in identity formations and radical subjectivity from Sara Suleri's perspective in selected texts by Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha.

DECOLONIZATION OF RACE AND GENDER: CHANDRA MOHANTY AND SARA SULERI'S CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO POETRY OF KAUR, ASGHAR AND PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA

The final chapter compares the contrasting views of Mohanty and Suleri as evaluated through the analysis of selected poetry. It shows the ways in which their approaches differ from each other. The comparison also provides insight to the challenges of decolonization when addressing issues of race and gender.

CONCLUSION

The researcher sums up the work done in the research and concludes the discussion with final remarks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher provides suggestions for future research related to areas that were not covered in this study.

1.6 Significance and Rationale of the Study

This study focuses on the poetry of three different South Asian diasporic female poets who go through similar feminist experiences even though their countries of origin and migration are different. The common element seen in their experiences shared in writing include ways in which they navigate through racial and gender bias in a predominantly white Western country as a woman of color. They also talk about social, political and economic consequences of bring brown immigrant women. They share their individual and collective feminist experiences as South Asian immigrant women in a manner that is different from the popular Western feminism of a white women. Their poetry interweaves the South Asian lifestyle, indigenous culture, diaspora, their personal approach to feminism, and experiences of classism, misogyny, sexism and racism. All of these features shape South Asian women's poetry and make it unique from poetry written by Western white women, especially because of the gap between their life experiences.

With the framework of Mohanty's *Decolonizing Theory*, the poetry of Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar, and Leah Lakshmi is explored to show the ways in which feminism operates beyond borders; whether they are geopolitical, racial or capital in nature. It discovers the possibility of decolonizing Western feminism while focusing on issues of race and class specific to South Asian women as presented in the selected poetry. The framework provided by Sara Suleri in *Women Skin Deep* analyzes the shortcomings of postcolonial feminism and the reasons for which an intersectional approach is ineffective in decolonizing feminism.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The range of this research study is limited to poetry of South Asian diasporic women who have immigrated to North America. Rupi Kaur is from an Indian-Sikh family that migrated to Canada, Fatimah Asghar is from a Pakistani-Muslim family that migrated to America, and Leah Lakshmi is from a Sri Lankan-Christian family that migrated to North America (dividing her time between both America and Canada). North America colonization is rooted in the same colonial history therefore the selection of poets ensures similar but not identical backgrounds and experiences of South Asian immigrant women in North American diaspora. The stylistic qualities or form of the poetry are not evaluated in order to focus on the themes pertaining to Mohanty and Suleri's particular ideas. The selection of poems has been limited to a single book written by each poet respectively.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"borders
are man-made
they only divide us physically
don't let them make us
turn on each other"
(Kaur 128)

2.1 Decolonization in "Third World" South Asia

In one of his definitive texts on colonization, Fanon challenges the success of decolonization as it is dependent on a complete social framework of bottom up transformation; where transformation is wanted, determined, conscious by the colonized; a historical development that can only be comprehended in the background of movements which contribute to the historical structure and material; always obvious due to its impact of the people, marked by violence that fundamentally changes them; and ultimately that decolonization is a genuine construction of new men. Thus, decolonization involves structural change at an individual, communal, and governmental level. It can only be incorporated through conscious extraction of agreement and opposition against structures of social and psychological hegemony. It is a shared, historical progress which can be fathomed only in the light of this background. The final output of decolonization is not manufacturing new types of sovereignty, but also "the creation of new men" (and women). Where the metaphors used Fanon's theory were mostly masculine, and his proposed form of opposition was also strongly gendered, Fanon's agenda for decolonization is beneficial in framing a project for feminist decolonization. As mentioned by Fanon, all levels of decolonization become essential to the project of radical feminist transformation, especially if misogyny, heterosexism and sexism are truly interconnected in the world's social fabric, entwined with capitalist, national, and racial hegemony and corruption, while overwhelmingly influencing lives of men and women, girls and boys. Third World feminist theories have always centralized decolonization (qtd. Mohanty 7-8).

Walter De Mignolo reflects on the idea of "decoloniality" that originates decolonization as a "disrupter" in academic discourse (Mignolo 106). It asserts the need to include years of colonial marcronarratives of power within which all human species exist and no one in beyond it holds a privileged position to confront coloniality (107-8). Thus, decoloniality is rooted in modernity and coloniality without which there would be nothing to decolonize (109). Modernity comes modernization and development where modernization was a substitute to the civilization mission and development substituted progress (110). Borders make paths within modernity and coloniality as a result of global linear thinking and international law. Borders are not limited to geography but exist everywhere in nationality, language, religion, aesthetics, epistemology, ontology, sexuality and race. According to Quijano, coloniality did not originate from Europe to address historical and economic concerns, rather it was a concept created by the Third World to expose the hidden side of history (qtd. in Mignolo 112). So, coloniality and decoloniality are direct products of each other. But decoloniality is not led by the state, but it is a project by the people who feel the need to dissociate themselves from the colonial matrix and reorganize within their local histories (115).

Furthermore, coloniality is not the same concept as colonialism. According to the Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, colonialism entails subjugation and domination of external forces on people. It is closely related to imperialism where the dependent territory's politics and economy are under control of the external forces (qtd. in Mignolo 116). On the otherhand, the term "decolonization" was established after the Second World War. The first wave of decolonization arose in the Americas which motivated the second wave in Asia and Africa. This resulted in different historical movements, independences and revolutions (Mignolo 123). But since decolonization kept coloniality intact, decoloniality materialized from the weaknesses of decolonization (124). The aim of decoloniality is to become decolonial subjects delinked from colonial matrix of power (125). Delinking occurs by reimagining and reinventing many organizations at different levels and in different areas affected by coloniality including racism and sexism controlled by patriarchal values, economic and political imperialism designed by patriarchy, knowledge and understand and life in almost all its aspects (126-127).

But here it is also necessary to understand what is meant by "Third World", not just in terms of cultural ages and geographical history. It often considered as a colonial, imperial, developmental and experimental subject formed in a space and time through democracy of the bourgeois along with other nation states (Prasad 58). In this perspective, Third World representation comes under great scrutiny as there is certain trauma attached to it. Acknowledgement of this trauma does not prevent the scrutiny of imperialistic, Westernized systems of representation as means to secure a controlling and dominant position. This is opposed to the inaccessibility of the native to such a powerful position that inflicts trauma upon them. Access to systems of representation require natives to attain a certain privilege in order to look at the past "self" that has been isolated from the current one by Western systems. In case of being able to encounter these systems of representation, natives can either recover and defend their lost identity. This also reveals how weak the sovereignty of the postcolonial subject is and that the possession of their identity was an illusion. Thus the subject attempts to "(re)discover" their past (Prasad 59).

One of the Third World regions that has been influenced by a long colonial reign is South Asia. The term South Asia was coined by American academic-government during the 1950s and 1960s. The American strategy and foreign policy were concerned with this geographical space.

South Asia was a "typical external term" which is a term given by outsiders associating their own significance but is not concerned with native importance. This term was not included in the discourse of Europe and particularly Britain. They considered India and Pakistan two states which were products of a partition of British colonial India. This partition was not considered a loss or a surprise by the British as they considered it a result of internal weaknesses whereas the colonial state was the strong framework that shaped it in to one political unit (Kaviraj 1).

There are two ways in which South Asia is viewed. At first, a concept developed from an academic perspective by American academia in 1950s based on the demands of postwar foreign policy of the United States. This perspective eliminates differences based on politics or culture that are important for the native. Instead it mostly focuses on the geographical importance of the region in the development of American strategy. With the passage of time this changed due to

growth of postcolonial states which needed to more serious analysis by the academia. Then focus on South Asia was acknowledged without giving central importance to only one postcolonial state. Generally, it was acknowledged but not given a formal name. It was a dynamic geographical region where there were multitudes of political establishments but neither the states not the people exclusively claimed each other. Borders of these states were permeable, fluctuating and ineffective regardless of which the modern state has confined singularized identities of the state through cultural and economic goods as well as political acts (Kaviraj 11). Even after the attempts to contain a unified state identity throughout history, South Asian identities continue to be plural. Furthermore, globalization has contributed to plurality of identities while making it more difficult for the state to establish a unified and stable hierarchy (Kaviraj 12).

South Asian identities, issues and communities have been studied in Postcolonial studies at length after the end of colonial rule in South Asia. Postcolonial theories and categorization of post-colonial literature influence academic studies towards critical analysis framed by structural methods forced on to the perspectives and feelings of an academic critic. Therefore it becomes unavoidable for academics to study literary work through the lens of such theories. As a result, they look at all literary works while keeping in mind aspects of nativization, anti-colonialism, subversion and resistance. It is possible that such analysis lead to discrimination against specific creativity abilities and literature produced by post-colonial nations. There is a strong sentimental value is attached to the post-colonial Third World's "obsession with" rootedness in national soil, even when an alien medium of description is used. So the use of a language that reaches out to a wider audience to communicate and interpret the reality of a post-colonial Third World nation becomes a political act which demands the artist to use their work as a "tool of resistance and subversion" (Meeggaswatta 232-33). Furthermore the "foreign" distrust and ambivalence of post-colonialism can be diverted from the poet who tries to explain the reality of a nation in a foreign language (234).

So, the end of political colonialism is not enough to diminish the long-lasting effects that it had on people. One manifestation has been called "colonization of the mind" by Marcelo Dascal. Many postcolonial scholars have examined this phenomenon while developing ways to challenge and remove the most detrimental

factor of colonization of mind i.e. controlling victim's minds (Dascal 3). In metaphorical sense of the term, colonization of the mind implies that an external colonizer is powerful enough to influence the main structure, content and processing of the colonized people's minds. This influence has permanent consequences. It establishes an unequal hierarchy of power. The colonizer and colonized might not even be aware of their voluntary/involuntary roles in the process of colonization (4). The question arises whether a colonized mind can be decolonized. The process of decolonization is equally, if not more, challenging and paradoxical than the process of colonization of the mind. It comprises of various strategies to eradicate the colonizer's influence on the mind of the colonized. For successful decolonization, firstly worldview of the colonizer must be disqualified. After this, it is importance to remove any remnants so that the colonized can recover and go back to their original, uncorrupted roots and traditions. The colonizer's derogatory views of their roots and traditions need to be removed so the colonized no longer associates negative beliefs and fears with them. Thirdly, it is important to destruct authority of the colonizer over conceptual systems, rules, categories, arguments, ideologies and behaviors. Then it is possible to question delegitimization of the colonized in various aspects of these systems. Instead of comparing the minds of the colonizer and colonized, a neutral and objective perspective is needed (14). Otherwise a more fundamental approach with overall defined conditions can be established. It will either appeal to debatable manipulation and basic oppositions or associate importance to identity, legitimacy and historical prioritization. Generally, complete decolonization of the mind is questionable in terms of practical accomplishment (15). It is difficult to regain and revive a stable identity of a person, nation or state as it was before colonization. Identities are fluid as they continue to change and interrelate with other identities. So, it is not a fixed 'object' that is rediscovered and put back in place to function as it did before (16).

2.1.1 Impact of Settler Colonialism in North America

North American history is deeply rooted in colonialism, even though historians have ignored many aspects and influences of it. Americans foreground national sentiments of American nation and American Revolution while placing history of colonial oppression in the background (Greene 235). Postcolonial studies in the past few decades have analyzed cultural, linguistic and political significance of

these former European colonies with particular focus on “nonsettler colonialism”. The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed an era of “high imperialism” concentrating on Middle Eastern, African and Asian colonial processes (236). In the past two decades, postcolonial scholars have started studying about the “diversity of colonialism” including settler colonialism. Settler societies are considered to be heterogeneous and politically dominated by descendants of European settlers. But the emphasis of scholarly work has been on highlighting the differences between settler colonials and exploitative colonies. They do so by presenting the improvements in culture, society, gender balance, economy and politics. The relationship between colonial powers and colonized people is claimed to have improved (237). But settler colonialism still fulfills the criteria of modern colonialism as settlers have still placed certain sections of society at the periphery through domination. They have sustained their dominant position through extreme measures including “physical and cultural genocide”, disruption, alienation, exploitation and violence (238). Colonial processes continued to intensify in the United States and Canada through hegemonic practices of indigenous people and enslavement of African Americans (240). The settlers showed no regard for the lives and rights of people who looked different from white Europeans or were from different cultures (247).

Settler colonialism is recognized as a type of colonialism where a settler society invades and replaces indigenous populations, after which the former establish their own distinct identity and independence. The United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa are considered settler colonial states that have used imperial tactics in international politics. Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in terms of permanent settlement in indigenous lands where they forcefully eliminate and suppress indigenous populations in order to assert their own sovereignty. Even though settler states claim not to exhibit colonial powers, they retain similar hierarchies and power structures. Government structures including police forces, also known as “Indian Agents” in North America, have exerted extreme powers on native American indigenous people including propagation of racist narratives. These narratives claim that indigenous people are savages. They are dehumanized and their women are hyper-sexualized. Settlers believe they are in need to be “civilized”. Studies done in 1990s and 2000s include intersectional approaches

where they discuss settler colonial theory in relation to other disciplines that intersect with issues of race and identity politics (Barker and Lowman).

Now-a-days, settler colonialism is taking the shape of neo-colonialism where there is a more homogenized impact of imperialism on cultures. Colonial and imperial practices are prevailing in North America even after pointing out it's disconnection with historical colonialism. Through cultural and imperial hegemony are tools of neo-colonialism which can also be related to "dependency theory". According to dependency theory, developed cultures overwhelm cultures of developing countries especially those which are economically dependent on the former. Developed countries use the resources and labour of the developing countries which is quite similar to what historical colonizers would do. Dependency theory also highlights the divide in to "core" and "periphery" established by settlers. The core remains at the center getting the most benefit out of this dependent neo-colonial relationship whereas the periphery turns in to a "semi-periphery" which also gets some benefits in the form of jobs and capital but they still struggle to succeed (Molag).

2.1.2 Decolonizing Feminism

Gender studies and theories related to postcolonialism are interlinked through academia, activism and politics. Keeping in view history and social aspects, it is essential to acknowledge relationship between gender and postcolonial theories. From the first to the current "third" wave of "post"-feminism, struggle for decolonization and autonomy, acknowledgement in diaspora, acquisition of rights along with local rights campaigns all contribute to the progress in intellectual elements of gender studies and postcolonial theory. This can be seen in the significant work done during the 1980s in Subaltern Studies Collective/Group which is considered a part of historical struggles related to representation and acknowledgement in colonial and postcolonial India. Furthermore, black and postcolonial feminist academia has accumulated in response to insufficiencies of "Western feminist politics" and the repeated universal categorization of "woman" (Gerrard & Sriprakash 1).

Arvin, et al. addresses decolonization linked to issues like settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy in Native feminist theories. When colonizers, settlers or newcomers claim ownership of the place the come to, through insistent political and social establishment, it is considered as "settler colonialism". Settler colonialism can

be observed when exploitation of people of color, native Americans and people considered to be "illegal" immigrants in United States is justified as a "persistent structure" (12). Whereas heteropatriarchy entails the normalization and naturalization of patriarchy and heterosexuality in social systems while notions that do not ascribe to heteropatriarchy is considered anomalous, abnormal and objectionable. It depends upon circumscribed definitions of male/female binary: the male is viewed as strong, skilled, smart and stoic and the female is innocent, submissive, confused and unskilled (13).

Native feminist theories not only innovate and reclaim perspectives but also visualize various forms of nationalism and future alliances with settler colonialism to examine its influence on Indigenous and settler communities. For instance, it addresses the interconnection of white supremacy in settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy in a gendered process that neglects Native discourses in Western feminist scholarship of settler colonial nation states like the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. As ethnic and women's studies expose social structures of race and gender as well as mythologies of racism and misogyny, in Native feminism they also focus on the prevalent settler colonial structures and its stronghold over Indigenous people and others (9). Native feminists acknowledge conventional "whitestream" feminist scholarship with the inclusion of transnational, third world, black, Latina and Native feminisms (10). According to Chow, in this way white privilege is challenged and neutralized for the inclusion of other races, sexualities and minorities (qtd. in Arvin, et al. 10). People of color, Indigenous and "othered" communities are given the "opportunity" to, either consciously or forcibly, disinherit their otherness in pursuit of inclusive whiteness (10). Therefore, theories in Native feminism contain the ability to "decolonize the ascendancy of whiteness" internationally, in alliance with other feminisms that share the same basic aims (11).

2.2 Postcolonialism, Race and Gender

During colonial reign of foreign powers in South Asia, colonizers established a hierarchy interlinked with patriarchy. They endorsed the Eurocentric ideology of domestic, modest and pure white women who were morally superior to colonized women. Colonizers used patriarchy to exploit women through their sexuality, unpaid domestic labor, social and marital rights, and social and religious status (Spencer-

Wood 477-478). Exploitation and discrimination against colonized women of color, as a result of external colonialism by foreign colonizers, also developed internal colonialism within colonized communities (479). Non-white races were considered naturally inferior from an evolutionary perspective which in turn led to white colonizers justification for imperialism (Rangan and Chow 4). Westernized standards of beauty contribute to colorism as a result of imperial influence on colonized women where lighter skinned people belonging to the same ethnic group are favored over darker skinned people. Colorism in South Asia is mostly rooted in social hierarchy and caste system (Basu). Present racialization of the other has transformed in to a threat to the culture and security of the West. But complete exclusion is now replaced with selective inclusion based of what Guattari and Deleuze call "degrees of deviance from whiteness" (qtd. in Sharma and Sharma 5). As a result, women face unequal treatment from foreign white men and men belonging to the same ethnic groups.

The issue of race and gender have been under particular scrutiny in academia, especially by white academics. The new way in which race is being studied was noted by bell hooks as separated from cultural practices that implicitly reinforce racism. Race is being appropriated through newly coined terms like "difference, the Other, hegemony, ethnography… exploitation and domination" (51-52). It is considered offensive to use old binaries of black and white so these new terms have become widely accessible to everyone without permission leading to a discourse of commodification and privilege combining race and culture in to the same category like ethnicity (52). Recent scholarship the issue of "Otherness" is related to any race other than white ranging from black and brown to even red, yellow and purple. Hooks brings to light the gap between apparent political efforts to remove racism and the discourse being used to underpin racism. The forces of competition, fear and denial behind racism can be figured out by detailed and informed analysis of "whiteness" (54).

The privilege associated with "whiteness" can be traced back to colonial rule which established racial hierarchy that ultimately became interlinked with class division. Colonial and postcolonial issues of race, ethnicity and class can be analyzed from the perspective of Marxism or by Max Weber's approach. From a Marxist point of view, social groups like racial ones are defined through "economic" processes and systems. Colonial powers achieved their capitalist goals globally with the help of

racism as they appropriated the labor of colonized nations. From Max Weber's "sociological" perspective, racial issues of colonized people cannot be understood through an economic lens. Economic perspective focuses on class privilege whereas sociological perspective focuses on race for the comprehension of colonial constructions in colonized societies (Loomba, 124).

In an essay, Caroline Mala Corbin highlights how particularly American media, news and even their government policy uses false narratives in favor of terrorism being linked to brown Muslims and implying that white people cannot be terrorists. The reason is because white privilege excludes white people from the narrative of terrorism while also propagating innocence and superiority exclusive to white people. This privilege also allows them to control the narrative against other races by using racial stereotypes (Corbin 456). Regardless of the claims that we currently live in the 'post-race' era with theories such as Critical Race and Postcolonial theory, racism is still a normal element in our society. Racism continues to discriminate individuals and social groups in order to maintain a social order hierarchy through oppression of non-white races (Patel 2). So in this "post-race era" where it is claimed that racial equality has been attained, people still exhibit a "measured response" for security purposes against brown people (Patel 3).

Generally, umbrella terms like "gender" and "postcolonial" contain an influential variety of theories related to the production and mobilization of gendered colonial connections. Firstly, it is necessary to create a theoretical framework through the comprehension of "marginality" and "difference" while challenging the hierarchies of power within them. Secondly, the Other's subjectification as a "woman" or "postcolonial" needs to be understood, limited and measured. Finally, the theoretical progress of change in education is challenging the ontology and epistemology of gender and colonial relationships along with associated presuppositions all over the world (Gerrard & Sriprakash 2).

In this way, feminist universalism is scrutinized by contemporary women of color and third-world women due to the claim that gender, class, sexuality and race intersectionality goes beyond modernized categories that are nuclear and separable. Lugones suggests a theorization that differs from modern, colonial gender system and its logic for modernized categorization, dichotomies and hierarchy (Lugones 742).

Coloniality of gender initially emerged when the Caribbean and Americas were colonized and the colonizers established a clear dichotomous hierarchy by differentiating between civilized humans (Western man) and non-humans (indigenous Americans and African slaves). The European man was a modern, bourgeois, heterosexual, Christian, ruling subject of civilization. But the European was not his counterpart. She served the European man through her submissiveness, domestication and sexual purity by reproducing their capital and race. On the other hand, the colonized were non-gendered, animalistic and sexual beasts of sin (743). People were not only colonized in terms of gender and power of coloniality but also actively objectified and reduced to dehumanized forms. As a result, semantically "colonized woman" is an empty category due to this non-gendered, dehumanized reduction (745). This coloniality of gender at the intersection of race, class and gender still exists due to present capitalist system, even after the end of colonization (746).

South Asian scholars have been evaluating the role of gender since the 1980s, especially in the context of history and society of South Asia, while also debating its link to Western feminism. Oftentimes particular, personal and relational theories are compared and contrasted against universalized theory related to postcolonial feminist scholarship. Women of color as well as postcolonial and Third World feminists have criticized who produces theory, where it emerges from and for what reason. Expansion of academic knowledge has led to inquire marginalization of contributions by Third World women and women of color in feminist scholarship and women's studies in the West (Loomba & Lukose 15).

Furthermore, Western studies conducted about South Asia are influenced by production of colonial knowledge. Additional progress was mostly extracted from the study of India where religious classification mainly defined "civilization" i.e. Sanskrit and Hindu traditions were associated with honor and privilege. Similarly ancient culture, histories, literatures and languages were honored in Orientalist scholarship. These aspects took precedence over their modern manifestations while simultaneously marginalizing other disciplines and knowledge (22).

Colonial rule greatly influenced idiosyncratic and linguistics associations as well as the cultural developments in South Asia that led to the establishment of anticolonial politics and policies. Therefore, feminists pay specific attention to

reinforcement of past and present communitarian, religious, or national irregularities that they examine (9). This has been pointed out by Flavia Agnes as the establishment of "Indianness" dependent on Hindu iconography and Sanskrit idiomatic expressions on female empowerment in contrast to the West (qtd. 9). Similarly, Amina Jamal points out the religious and nationalist vocabularies that are publicly used in Pakistan in the context of feminist movements. For instance, she mentions women in the Jamat-e-Islamic who project religiosity of Islamic piety that has been formed through the particular and lengthy South Asian tradition. Now this image is being altered by Western military forces and conversational attacks on Muslim communities (especially in Pakistan) on the basis of apparent "War on Terror" (qtd. 10). Furthermore, Niloufer de Mel highlights how Western academy tends to assimilate South Asia even though there are often distinct historical and regional differences between the countries. For instance, the Sri Lankan history is influenced by India but India is not as influenced by Sri Lankan history regardless the state's "big-brotherly attitude" (qtd. 11).

The postcolonial experience of South Asians can be characterized in certain ways. For instance, the concept of "Empire" is focused and colonial history is questioned. Literature produced by Pakistani and Indian writers thematically cover the pain of Partition, the struggle for Independence and the trauma that followed. Bangladeshi literature reflects upon the cruel civil war that occurred in pursuit of independence from Pakistan. Sri Lankan literature articulates the Tamil Tigers and Sinhala ethnic tensions, carnage and violence resulting from it, and the dislocation of 1.5 million people. The focus of many writings has been to redefine nations and nationalistic ideologies (Nimavat 33). Poets of diaspora frequently exhibit a sense of rootlessness and trauma of dislocation. Presently, many women poets of diaspora are articulating their happiness and pain through their poetry (36).

Ranasinha draws attention to women who write in diaspora liberated from colonial manipulation and the influence of critically acclaimed male writers. Many South Asian female writers who write in English have challenged the hegemony of male writers by establishing their own narrative niche. These female writers include a diversity, significance and globalized assort of diasporic, religious, cultural and social issues like migration. They incorporate these aspects as a part of anti-migrant history, laws and sentiments in countries like the UK (Imran 30). Present issues like

transnational migration and globalization are not new but have built up from the foundations of colonialism, empire, race and nation. Feminist scholarship creates a connection between the past and present, national and international events (Loomba & Lukose 14).

2.2.1 Aspect of Immigration

Numerous South Asian immigrants have experienced traumatic histories of physical and mental violence. Many studies conducted in the past related to migration, gender and sexuality overlooked elements of discrimination in terms of ethnicity, class and religious or cultural backgrounds of people. The overall result led to numerous prejudices among women of color who belonged to various economic classes (Crenshaw; Hooks qtd. in Gatt et. Al 3). Even now, discourse of migration is dominantly Eurocentric and hegemonic displaying postcolonial superiority (Varela & Dhawam qtd. in Gatt 3). Western narrative dominates Eastern and Global South discourse through monopoly of 'civilization' and 'emancipation' in terms of race and gender (Gatt 3). The military action of the U.S. is considered a modern form of colonization in which they are trying to take over resources of other countries and control the global economy (Pomeranz 34). The past empires used 'civilizing' whereas present America uses 'nation-building' and 'development' as justifications to remotely control countries while sustaining the East/West and citizen/subject dichotomy (34-35). Even when ex-colonies gained independence, the after effects on their politics and economy were adverse (35).

Postcolonial evaluation of counter narratives provide insight to inner uncertainties and examples of resistance that are otherwise suppressed in Western discourse. Deconstructing Western discourse reveals the reality of capitalism and imperialism (qtd. in Mtairi 3). In 'other' narratives, Foucauldian counter discourse, Edward Said's idea of resistance and identity counter-knowledge emerge from this hegemonic Western discourse about the 'Orient' (Mtairi 4-5). Work written by migrant writers provided material insight to hybrid culture, history, techniques and use of language to express their resistance of dominant Western discourse and literary canon. They use their work to rewrite a particular aspect of history or challenge common political views (qtd. in Mtairi 8).

Rachel Silvey discusses the role of gender in migration and its study in feminist scholarship. In the history of migration, Willis and Yeoh mention patterns and experiences of women that have particularly been neglected in the history of migration (qtd. in Silvey 1) whereas contemporary analysis of migration inspects consequences of connections between gender and migration (Silvey 1). Her work discusses various researched intersections of migration and feminism including nationalism and citizenship, confines of race and ethnicity, social oppression on the basis of sexuality, categorization based on spatial identity, belonging and exclusion, and influence of space and society on diasporic communities. Therefore, current feminist studies have started to examine how gender shapes migration, meanings of difference, social hierarchy, structural subjectivities and geographies of inequality (2). Brown describes that frequently throughout history, migration is studied from economic perspective while mostly neglecting the influence of cultural struggles in terms of the migrants' experiences and meanings of spaces (qtd. in Silvey 7). Nagel elaborates the way in which feminist studies look at identities of migrants through differences, idiosyncrasies and contrasts with groups' identities (qtd. in Silvey 9). They are viewed as dynamic and evolving identities instead of fixed and defined characters. Cultural identities of migrants are examined by focusing on sites of origin for gender cultures, particular patriarchal manifestations and migrants' gendered social system (9).

Gillian Youngs considers it necessary to acknowledge the fundamental concepts and problems of International Relations when studied by feminists. Gender in terms of masculinity and its multifaceted complexity is emphasized whereas women's lives, its diversity, strategies and identities should also be focused including hierarchy of power between men and women along with power differences among women. Mainstream predominant male-constructed reality is a major issue in this regard. It is a determining factor in investigating knowledge and ontological revisionism (Youngs 77). Another critical question is why male-dominance is influential and unchallenged. The role of masculinity is significant in development of frameworks and structuring of social hierarchies where women and even 'feminized' men are categorized as 'others' due to colonial, racial and various other factors including sexuality (Youngs 79-80). Naturalization of coding man as the subject

("master") and woman as the object ("matter") since Aristotle has resulted in man's de-politicized exploitation of women, other men and even nature (qtd. in Youngs 81).

2.3 Indigenous Forms of South Asian Feminism

The status of woman in South Asia has been given abundant attention and questioned in terms of its symbolic significance in a backward or progressive society. The impact of modernity and tradition were contemplated by colonizers and males of elite class, from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Women determined the standard of colonies for autonomy. As opposed to this, males of elite class proclaimed anti-imperialism and refrained from arguing about the status of women to save their tradition from Western colonial interference. Women, especially women from middle class, actively participated in anti-colonial debates and movements (Azim, et al. 1). Jayawardena considered it impetus to ideologies of women's rights and liberty at a national level (qtd. in Azim, et al. 1).

Feminist struggles and perspectives in South Asia are highly influenced by location within the region. For instance, the subcontinental partition in 1947 had a deep impact on Pakistan and India, and later by extension on Bangladesh. On the other hand, Nepal and Sri Lanka were not influenced by this event as they were dealing with issues of ethnic and national divisions (1). Feminist struggles in South Asia have not only been influenced historically, but also by religious identities, caste and class, along with their role in geopolitical progress within nation-states. Feminist activism has grown over the past century. Women have addressed issues of their livelihood, sexual abuse, state repression and religious fundamentalisms (3).

Afiya Shehrbano Zia reflects upon feminism in Pakistan throughout it's history. One of the determining factors is religion and religious identity in Pakistan. From its inception, Pakistan's right-wing Islamic school of thought has conflicted with left-wing liberal approach towards feminism. Zia-ul-Haq's military rule focused on Islamization which added to troubles of women's position in Pakistan. On the other hand, modern and liberal activists resisted Islamic fundamentalism. Inconsistency on part of Pakistani feminists and their polarizing identities have added controversy to the global perspective of Pakistan, especially in terms of war on terror (Zia 30). After 9/11, the political identities of Pakistani women have been divided in

to categories of liberal and modern women as opposed to regressive, conservative and 'talibanized' ones. The overall patriarchal discourse contributed to these stereotypes related to nationalist identities and war on terror where Pakistani woman's identity was not 'born again' but merged instead. Consequently, western audience looks at women as symbols either of progressive and modern nation or veiled fundamentalists who base their politics on faith (31). In 1981, the Women's Action Forum (WAF) was established to fight against Martial Law and Islamization in Pakistan (32). Saba Mahmood explains that a strong secular stance was required to uproot the patriarchal oppression caused by Islamization at the time (qtd. in Zia 32). The dilemma of choosing between either a religious or a secular identity added to the pressure on women from political, religious and feminist groups. Liberal feminist efforts were criticized by the religious right as foreign, western and modern ideologies. Regardless of the resistance and emergence of new socio-political religious movements, progressive women's rights advocates were able to succeed in their solidarity and empowerment strategies that explained western feminist theory in the context of local and indigenous culture (33). Academic debates and scholarship, especially after 9/11, began to focus on exploring, reviewing and reinterpreting Islamic economic, social and legal history with respect to the issue of feminism (34). Therefore, the question of women within and beyond the scope of faith-based Islamic framework was being explored (35).

Nivedita Menon reflects on the role of gender with respect to caste, sexuality and governmentality in India. Since the 1990s, the term 'gender' either entails dissolution of 'woman' category and gender identity or development towards its stability. Furthermore, gender i.e. women are viewed within a patriarchal social set up. Gender is majorly influenced by politics of sexuality and caste in India. Common female experience and subsequently the identity of 'woman' is questioned on the basis of caste politics. On the other hand, sexuality politics addresses the bipolarity of male and female, inevitability of identifiable gender-coded bodies, naturalization of heterosexuality and institutionalization of marriage (Menon 95). The position of women, especially in politics, is linked to its representation of certain castes. Reservations for women who speak in favor of Dalits or 'backward castes' are denounced by the Parliament in favor of upper-caste politics. Oppression that lower caste women face is different from the upper-caste women. So, women are not only

discriminated on the basis of their biological identity, but also disempowered on the basis of the cultural and socioeconomic position. Therefore, caste identity splits the category of gender even further (96). Furthermore, the otherwise taboo subject of sexuality began to emerge publicly after widespread use of television in the 1990s. Broadcasting Western corporate media on private Indian cable channels slowly destigmatized sexuality. As a result, there was a demand to repeal heteronormative political assertions like that in Section 377 of the India Penal Code where non-heteronormative people and institutions like transgenders, homosexuals and sex workers were penalized on the basis of their sexuality. Women's movement created a natural alliance with Counter-Heteronormative movements in India. It was argued that sexuality is an elitist issue regardless of which challenging heteronormativity has now become a strong part of Indian feminist political agenda (98).

While there have been many feminist movements in India, the term Feminism itself is considered relatively new. While the term "feminism" was first used in Europe in the 19th century, association with the movement was avoided especially since Indian society was not ready to transform according to western ideologies of liberalism and civilization (Panikkar qtd. in Pande 4). With the passage of time, India has seen establishment of institutions as well as movements against discrimination and in favor of gender equality and justice (Pande 2). Development of feminism in India can be divided in to two diverse phases, one is the era before independence and the other is after independence (3). The first phase (1850-1915) was highly influenced by Western ideals of liberalism. Notions of liberty, equality and fraternity where taught through English studies to the educated elite. So Western ideologies rendered into movement of social reformation that was controlled by the colonial rule. Such movements did not homogenize with the local traditions, ideologies and culture leading to contradictions. The position of India women in the country was weak and 'social reformers' reiterated that they could not progress as long as they remained 'backward'. Similarly, reforms did not address issues of patriarchy existing in India, instead simply highlighted deterioration of Indian society (4). Regardless of British colonial hegemony, women sought reformation in legislation and education which favored patriarchal structures (5). After World War I, the second phase witnessed the establishment of three chief organization by women between 1917 to 1927: Women's India Association (WIA), National Council of Women in India (NCWI) and All India

Women's Conference (AIWC). This phase was marked by nationalism and stronger struggles against colonialism. A large number of women began publicly taking charge against oppression by actively participating in freedom movements among which most prominent was the Civil Disobedience movement (6). Resultingly, legislative actions were taken in favor of women such as the right to vote and constitutional equality. According to Article 15(3) in the 1949 Constitution of India, women are entitled to special provisions from the State (qtd. in Pande 7).

From 1947 onwards, independence, partition and migration followed by communal violence in Bengal and Punjab, and war in Kashmir severely impacted India. It led to The Period of Accommodation (1947-1960s) of the third phase where women worked for their civic rights in the Constitution of India. The Marriage Act of 1954 and The Hindu Code Bill of 1955-56 addressed issues related to succession, marriage, adoption, divorce and guardianship. The latter bill legalized monogamy, interreligious and inter-caste marriages while abolishing child marriages. It also gave both men and women the equal right to divorce (Pande 7). India faced an economic crisis in the late sixties which led to The Period of Crisis (1960s-1975). During this period, efforts for middle and lower middle class women were foregrounded. The Progressive Organization of Women was established by Maoist women in 1973-74. It aimed to intentionally criticize radical feminist leftist politics with an all-encompassing study of gender oppression. They addressed matters of inflation, street harassment of women, dowry and struggles of women living in slum areas. Other autonomous groups brought up important issues of violence, rape, domestic work, dowry deaths and party politics. The official Status of Women Commission published their report "Towards Equality" in 1974 that explained the low status of women in India society regardless of legislative and constitutional reforms. Women were still treated as inferiors at social, political and economic fronts (8). "A Blue Print of Action Points and National plan of Action for Women 1976" aimed to implement the recommendations made in "Towards Equality" by taking measures in fields of health, nutrition, family planning, education, social welfare, employment and legal status and provisions (8). From 1975 onwards, India has seen a growth in women welfare organizations including SEWA, National Council of Women (Pune), National Commission of Women (Dehli), Kali for Women (Dehli), Joint Women's Program (Dehli) etc. As previous movements pursued improvement, these groups demanded

acknowledgement of women's rights (10). They brought up major issues of marginalization, lack of representation in media, rising fundamentalism, violence against women and missing girl children (9). It has led to a change from welfare to progress to women participating in development and their empowerment (10).

The South Asian region has seen important feminist work develop rapidly during the last forty years. This has led to reevaluation of including colonial and post-colonial history, literature, culture, law, domestic and family life, nation-state, labor relations, sexualities, and ethnic and religious identities. Loomba and Lukose are of the view that such feminist explorations in this region contribute to the wider scope of feminist theory. Their compiled work "South Asian Feminisms" focuses on the indigenous issues and diverse South Asian locations while engaging and acknowledging contemporary feminist efforts (1).

The recent history of South Asia has led to certain novel yet significant views in feminist thinking and organization that has proved to be beneficial beyond this region (1-2). Furthermore, the global events and conflicts including migration, religious fundamentalism, nationalism and militarism contribute to establishing new modes to express sexual and gender identities. In this pursuit, government as well as NGOs use feminist terms and agendas like inclusion and "empowerment" by appropriating them. This has resulted in a diluted adaptation of feminist agendas, giving rise to newer forms of feminist activism. Subsequently all of this has developed a link between theoretical feminism and feminist activism along with "the West" and "South Asia" (2). The term "feminism" itself encompasses plurality (2-3).

In Western Academy, Women's studies encompasses "institutionalized scholarly inquiry, putatively interdisciplinary" (22). Therefore, it privileges specific scholarship and methods and mostly marginalizes contributions by women from developing or Third World countries and women of color. The place of South Asia in fields of feminist and women's studies along with the place of feminism in South Asian studies is still under scrutiny. "South Asian studies" are scarce in South Asian universities. Therefore, the inclusion and placement of feminist in Western academy's "South Asian studies" is questionable. So the expansion of feminist scholarship in South Asia probes "institutionally sanctioned ignorance" towards contribution by Third World women and women of color in Western women's studies and feminism.

It is pertinent to include non-Western views and experiences to universalize women's studies in order to centralize the issues of gender and women regardless their location or geographical placement (23).

Earlier feminist works related to South Asia were concerned with dismantling the heritage of colonial epistemologies, explaining nationalism and the postcolonial state consequently loaded with questioning past colonial histories, decolonization and establishment of postcolonial nations. New perspectives of feminism reexamined the role of gender and sexuality in the patriarchal system, postcolonial ideologies, anticolonial nationalisms and emergence of subcontinental nation-states (4).

Kumari Jayawardena discussed Middle-Eastern and Asian national history from feminist perspectives in *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. In her book, she contended that feminism was imported from the West and that it had arose in the ex-colonies from struggles against Imperialism (qtd. Loomba and Lukose 4). From there on South Asian feminisms revised several disciplines and their scholarship regardless of which the colonial and contemporary politics have continued to be a major influence (4-5).

The connection between Western and South Asian feminism is being revised. According to Ratna Kapur, the postcolonial feminist movement in India is associated with the left, liberal and progressive movements, which have altogether reached stagnation. She suggests that South Asian feminists need to revisit their own history, traditions and postcolonial theory in order to establish indigenous concepts of gender, identity and liberty (qtd. 6-7). Mrinalini Sinha advocates viewing the concepts of sexuality and gender within the specific context of South Asia otherwise we will continue to use Eurocentric perspectives and binaries of men and women to analyze non-European histories and contexts. Both Sinha and Kapur emphasize revisiting the past and revising feminist ideologies according to the local differences from colonial and liberal history. Instead of insisting on local culture and history being "unique and untranslatable", the feminists in South Asian must face and resolve current challenges related to feminism (qtd. 7).

In pursuit of new and global approaches to feminism, phrases like "international feminism", "transnational feminism", "relational and multicultural feminism" and "feminism without borders" were devised in scholarship by women-

of-color and Third World feminists (23). Ella Shohat criticizes such reductive formulations as they use global feminism to imitate Eurocentric "sponge/additive" cultural notions (qtd. 24).

In totality, it is possible for contemporary feminists to reassess past presumptions about feminism along with the weaknesses of colonialism, nationalism and the postcolonial state. They neither ignore nor fixate on the differences between Western and South Asian approach to feminism. Such feminist scholarship is not limited to or restricted by geopolitical boundaries. This allows South Asian feminists to inquire beyond the confines of national borders and inspect history of migration along with formation of diasporic communities in the context of colonial and contemporary global political history. After the formation of postcolonial nation-states in South Asia in the late twentieth century, feminist scholarship has been under scrutiny for its association of women to communalism and religious nationalism. For instance, Islamization in Bangladesh and Pakistan, widespread Hindu Right assertion in India, and conflict between Tamil and Sinhala nationalisms leading to violence in Sri Lanka influence feminist scholarship and concerns in the regions (8).

The feminist work that emerged after several partitions in the subcontinental region showed a constant effort to transcend institutional and nation-state borders. There was continuous critiquing on the gendered violence that surfaced from the 1947 Indo-Pak subdivision followed by the separation of Bangladesh in 1971. During this time, not only were women deprived of their emotional and legal rights but establishment of mental, physical and even national borders were somehow influenced by their bodies and their honor. The restructuring of national boundaries often did not displace the women but instead alienated them in their homes when Muslim women stayed in India and Hindu women were in Pakistan (11). The new postcolonial state claimed to "rescue" them by forcibly deporting them to the place where they belonged. These women were exposed to violence as they were considered representatives of domestic, patriarchal and even nationalist beliefs (12). Among other things, feminists in South Asia are concerned with matters related to female agency, their rights and documentational limitations in relation to pre-colonial and colonial national histories and various structures of family and patriarchy (16).

Over the past few decades, feminist theorization has based several of its arguments on the deconstruction of "universal feminist subject" of "woman" leading to evaluation of gender essentialism and composition of feminist agency (18). Basic reconsideration in defining feminist subject and the issue of "difference" has been stimulated by two categories of caste and religion adding pressure to the category of "woman" (further divided into categories like sex worker, Hindu/Muslim, mother, slum dweller, temple dancer). These categories are categorically considered similar to immigrant identities and racial differences. Presently in South Asia, identity-related movements (ethnic nationalisms, religious, violent and militaristic) deflect from the issue of "difference" (19).

South Asian diaspora and related forms of feminism are influenced by multiple global factors rooted in their home and in diaspora (Rajan and Desai 1). Feminism influences everyday occurrences and nuances in diaspora as well as broader transnational issues in the context of constantly changing issues of gender. The idea of 'Transnational Feminism' provides an alternative to international or global feminisms where women are grouped into a 'sisterhood' confined by territorial boundaries. This form of feminism often intersects with Third World feminisms and postcolonialism when addressing issues of race, capitalism, nationalism, empire, war, neoliberalism and state violence. It is concerned with a wide scope of gender issues which are particular to certain regions, including South Asia, and also tackle general domains. South Asian feminisms in diaspora also overlap with Transnational feminism in terms of epistemology and geopolitics embedded in South Asia and regions of diaspora. Due to the history of South Asia, South Asian feminism deals with many related and overlapping areas including racialization and transnational collaborations of women of color, war and empire, trauma of Partition etc., which cannot be summed up in singularity (2).

Furthermore, South Asian identities are socially constructed through political, economic and social aspects of history and contemporary events which intersect with religion, nationality, class, caste, ethnicity, language, race and language (Ralston 455). Identity associations impact immigrants in diaspora, particularly women. Regardless of diversity of backgrounds, issues of marriage, health and education still abide by South Asian customs and values (460). Overall, region of settlement is inseparable from race, class and gender where many women face many difficulties

ranging from social and geographical barriers, lack of support system, cultural and lifestyle differences to change in gender roles, isolation and language issues (464). Immigrant groups from South Asia have formed various advocacy-oriented organization in countries including Canada, Australia and New Zealand to address the concerns of women in diaspora (465). These organizations aim to empower South Asian immigrants, raise awareness regarding their concerns, protect their rights and protect communities from unequal and unjust policies, programs and structures. There are several service-oriented organizations including the Immigrant and Multicultural Services Societies throughout Canada and the United Muslim Migrants Association (466).

2.4 The Poets & their Poetry

The place of South Asian women in literature is not only debated on the basis on gender, but it is also linked to various postcolonial issues. The positioning of women is complicated in terms of politics and culture as community and class differences arise. In particular, the narratives of Muslim and Hindu women present stark differences in pursuit of establishing post-colonial nationhood. Furthermore, issues of communal differences, national identities, sexuality, domesticity, romance and love are addressed by South Asian women in their writings (Azim, et al. 5).

Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Lakshmi are all critically acclaimed poets from South Asia. They immigrated from South Asian countries to North America. Their poetry depicts their experiences, thoughts and sentiments about their "home" before and after immigration. It is important to listen to what they articulate, as diaspora poetry is not given much attention. Especially in America, diasporic poetry is neglected as it lacks a sense of belonging in America or back home. It is necessary to make the poets feel like they belong here and there (Daruwalla).

On one hand, a reader can look at their poetry from the aspect of diaspora but that is not the only factor that influences their work. Such contemporary poetry is narrated subjectively that depicts personal experiences in the form of autobiographical confessions. Feminist undertones are present but the poetry cannot be limited to it either. In a foreign land, South Asian women write (both poetry and novels) about how they have several split identities. They use a creative outlet as they try to find a

home where they belong. South Asian diasporic poetry written by women include themes of literary freedom, personal desires, patriarchy, home, identity, marginalization, nationality and sexuality. They use a confessional style in poetry through which they explore new horizons and histories of their lives and times (Swamy 445). After migration, diasporic female writers focus on new perspectives of globalization, narration and gender (Imran 129). But eventually it is up to the individual writer to decide their mode of writing, targeted audience and influence of disciplinary and institutional location as well as personal history on their writing (Loomba and Lukose 16).

Among many emerging South Asian poets, Rupi Kaur has gained critical acclaim as a #1 New York Times bestselling poet. Her poems are accompanied by illustrations that she draws herself. Kaur describes her life as an "exploration of that artistic journey". In 2014, she published her first book of poetry 'milk and honey', after completion of her degree in rhetoric studies. It sold over a million copies. It was critically praised at an international level and translated in over thirty languages. In 2017, she published her second book of poetry 'the sun and her flowers'. It encapsulates a wide-range of themes including migration, loss, trauma, healing, love, femininity, and revolution ("About | Rupi Kaur").

Kaur's poetry nurtures a certain consumable depth which is delicately appears in unanticipated places. She adds intimacy into daily routine, conversations, and overflowing newsfeeds by incorporating minimalism and fragmented stanzas which form her aesthetic. Their collective experience establishes a context around her work. She opens a door of resistance for many other young women to speak out. The spoken word industry has grown through the contribution of work by women like Kaur. It is now dominated by women who freely write about sexuality, feminism, racism, love and trauma. Some critics have reduced Kaur's work to the label of "sad brown girl poetry" and claim that her success is exaggerated (Sivaraman).

Regardless of this, in almost all her poems Kaur introduces treatment of the body as a cultural vessel. Kaur and many of her peers implicitly mention their diasporic/immigrant experience. But it is Kaur who provides a direct insight to and representation of the diasporic experience of a female from South Asia. She uses certain phrases that invoke the diasporic experience, identity and a sense of

belonging—in a foreign country, in one's brown skin. Even though her experiences of South Asia are thinned down, they still anchor the readers back to poetry. Her work pursues an precursory feeling of recognition and then crafts it in to a deeply rooted sentimentality through its lyrics and musicality. Her poems spring from nostalgia and commemoration. In this way she has provided readers with the tender apparatus that is fundamental to comprehend the totality of identity, race, and overall psychological wellbeing (Sivaraman).

Another diasporic poet is the Pakistani-American Fatimah Asghar. She is an educator, performer, filmmaker, and poet. Her work has been published in various journals like *The Margins, POETRY magazine, Buzzfeed Reader, Gulf Coast, Academy of American Poets* etc. A spoken word poetry group called REFLEKS was created by Asghar in Bosnia and Herzegovina when she was studying theater in post-genocidal countries on a Fullbright. In fall 2015 her chapbook *After* was released on Yes Yes Books. She co-created and wrote an Emmy-nominated web series *Brown Girls* that centers the friendships shared by women of color. In 2018 she wrote a collection of poetry called *If They Come For Us* that delves in to the heritage of Partition and orphan-hood. In 2019, she and Safia Elhillo are the editors of the anthology *Halal If You Hear Me* which celebrates women, gender nonconforming, queer and/or trans Muslim writers ("About—Fatimah Asghar").

Her debut poetry is a poignant and ingenious collection of poetry that depicts a Pakistani Muslim girl's experience in American during her youth. Fatimah Asghar lost her parents as a girl and consequently coped with adolescence on her own. She had no mother or father to guide her on how to navigate questions of race and sexuality. Her poems simultaneously contain compassion, vulnerability, happiness, and agony, while going through many forms of violence: how it is passed on from generation to generation, how it perseveres inside us, and how in reveals itself in our relationships. The language Asghar uses is raw and lyrical even though she experiments with different forms. She interweaves the histories of marginalized people with her own perception of home and identity ("If They Come For Us—Fatimah Asghar"). Muneeza Shamsie reflects on how writings of South Asian Muslims show a realistic picture of the present along with a interdependent Euro-Muslim past that emerges from the Indo-Muslim imagination. In this way a new style of narration arises exhibiting equitability and imminent multiculturism (Shamsie 154).

If They Come For Us encapsulates extensive emotionality from the perspective of an intimate observer, with the vast multinational, multilingual history of a family. It shows us the real side of people victimized by arbitrary decisions of imperialists like the British Empire's actions. In 1947 they attempted to demarcate India and Pakistan by establishing a border on the basis of religious differences. This scarred people in both countries. The poems in *If They Come for Us* cover many lifetimes. It describes the loss of parents as victims of collateral damage and the value of victoriously rising against the odds of being a historical afterthought. Finally, it also shows the meaning of being an American. (Greenfield)

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a Burgher/Tamil Sri Lankan-American educator, organizer, performance artist and queer, disabled femme writer. She is the author of multiple works including *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice, Love Cake* and *Bodymap*. Her works have gained international critical acclaim and were short-listed for the Lambda and Publishing Triangles Awards. She is also the co-editor of *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*. Her performance art and writing incorporate disability justice, colonization, diasporic experience and feminism. She also reflects on these themes in her essays like *Colonize This, A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World, Dear Sister, Undoing Border Imperialism* and *Homelands.* ("About Leah")

Her work originates from various different communities and transcends several boundaries, creating a meshwork. She expresses her diasporic experience from the lens of a disabled, queer woman of color. She openly describes her struggle, pain and hardships in her poems. Her poetry in *Bodymap* explores new realms, new forms of pain and inculcates them in the form of new knowledge (Greider).

Lakshmi weaves the love story of a femme-of-color, disabled and queer human in a vulnerable and tough manner. She expresses her longing, transformation in love, illness, survivor spirit and all kinds of homes one claims and deserves. Her literary genius is evident through her hard femme poetics. ("Bodymap")

The themes of *Bodymap* span from ableism and sexuality to family and cultural imperialism. The wide range of experiences Lakshmi provides depict anti-capitalistic, anti-racial and anti-colonial sentiments. She criticizes capitalist and ableist agendas that ignore anything 'deviant' beyond the parameters of 'normality' in

the society. She paints a romantic picture in these conditions. Her poems tell stories of many different lives and histories dwelling in their present state on the page. Her words demand attention from the readers as she impeccably integrates individual voice and social commentary. She aims to unfold the hidden and neglected nooks of the world as she invites the readers to open their hearts to them. At the same time, she protects the people who live in such places and circumstances, especially against people who might not be mindful as they enter this territory (Liew).

2.5 Conclusion

The researcher has reviewed previous literature and theoretical work written about race, gender, postcolonialism and feminism particularly to South Asia. The evolution and development of decolonization in the Third World is discussed in the light of colonial history of South Asia. Origin of the term "Third World" is explained as well, since postcolonial and feminist theories use this term quite often for South Asia. History of colonialism helps the researcher understand the different ways in which colonialism impacts lives of colonized countries in South Asia. It also mentions contemporary manifestations of colonialism, particularly in America. The review covers important elements of race and gender, and their connection in terms of postcolonial and feminist ideas. This section includes role of immigration in racial and gender bias as the selected poets for this study are immigrant women from South Asia. It describes various forms of feminism and the role of women in South Asia. Finally, the works and lives of the poets have been reviewed in the last section of this chapter.

CHAPTER 3

TRACING THE URGE TO DECOLONIZE RACE AND GENDER IN SELECTED POETRY THROUGH CHANDRA MOHANTY'S LENS

"This border is rotten meat, a hallucination, a wavering line
a stupid idea. Can't we blink and it'll be gone?"
(Piepzna-Samarasinha 66)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher explores themes related to race and gender in selected poetry by Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha from the perspective of decolonization. The analysis is carried out from two different approaches towards interconnected aspects of race and gender in postcolonial feminism. This chapter uses the theoretical framework suggested by Chandra Mohanty. She approaches decolonization by exploring underlying racist, capitalist and feminist themes in the context of post colonialism and imperialism. These themes are interpreted in terms of how they successfully decolonize race and gender or where they fail to do so and why.

Decolonizing feminism in this framework involves examining feminist discourse and scholarship specific to women of color, especially from Third World ex-colonies. An intersectional approach to feminism and decolonization differs from First World feminism in the West as it aims to deconstruct oppressive structures of both patriarchy and colonialism at the same time. Intersectionality deals with overlapping key elements of race, gender and class.

Chandra Mohanty focuses on postcolonial influence of patriarchy in the terms of racism, capitalism and misogyny in the lives of Third World women. She asserts that colonial and patriarchal oppression continues to affect the lives of colonized people, regardless of geographical boundaries (Mohanty 2). Racism, classism and misogyny have become a part of individual and collective experiences of Third World women all over the world. Such experiences are shared by Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha in their poetry.

3.2 Decolonizing Theory and Experiences

Decolonization is a complicated task for immigrant women of color as they have to deal with after-effects of colonization, the traumas of their parents as well as their own experiences of racism and capitalism in North America. But decolonization is necessary to understand the degree of influence that colonization has in construction of discourse that is often marginalized by Western writers.

Rupi Kaur provides insights to decolonization by acknowledging the systematic colonial oppression in her end-titled poem "colonise". She criticizes colonizers for splitting the world in to pieces and declaring "ownership" on countries that "never belonged" to them and as a result, colonized nations were left with nothing. She challenges justification of colonial boundaries. Kaur questions the authority of their ownership of countries that "never belonged" to the colonizers. She also draws attention to colonizers' forceful control over resources of other countries for their own benefit, while depriving the natives ("colonise" 137).

Similarly, Piepzna-Samarasinha criticizes borders created by colonial conquests and insists that colonial borders do not need to be geographical to enforce a clear division of the colonizers and the colonized. She writes,

> "If a map is created by conquerors and the unconquered / … these maps can be rewritten." ("Bodymap" 6)

Piepzna-Samarasinha decentralizes power given to colonizers and highlights the impermanence of colonial constructs including geographical divisions. But colonial exploitation is not just political or social, but it affects colonized people, especially women, on an individual level. South Asian women experienced biological and sexual oppression under colonial rule in the form of patriarchy. Piepzna-Samarasinha talks about this aspect when she says,

> Rewrite my body
> If a map is an artifact made by explorers and colonizers
> if a map names where bodies begin and end & who will own
> their treasures. ("Bodymap" 6)

She expresses her desire to undergo a transformation giving her bodily autonomy that was previously controlled by patriarchal authorities. She relates it to "explorers and colonizers" who claim the bodies and sexuality of women of color as exotic. Even though patriarchy affects women all over the world, colonialism still associates a certain privilege to white women who were considered more beautiful and pious in contrast to women of color. So, Piepzna-Samarasinha wants to "rewrite" her body which was mapped by explorers and colonizers claiming it as "their treasures" (6).

She presents similar ideas in "Wrong is not yours" in which she is reevaluates the parts of her personality that are associated with the oppression faced by her ancestors (Piepzna-Samarasinha 68). She decides to replace "Albrecht" in her name with the name of her great-grandmother. The name "Albrecht" is Germanic in origin as several Albrecht families from Europe immigrated to the US ("Albrecht Family History"). Albrecht is significant in Sri Lankan colonial history as the surname of Burghers who descended from male European settlers who had children with indigenous women who were mostly Sinhalese and Tamil. Burghers were solely linked to their European fathers with no association to the mother or other ethnic groups in the family ("About Sri Lankan Burghers"). She says, "who decides you wants to change her name from Albrecht no / more Albrecht" showing obsoleteness of colonial power over her identity ("Wrong is not yours" 68). She mentions being influenced by the works of Franz Fanon, Marlon Riggs and Chrystos who wrote about race, sexuality, decolonization and rights of black and indigenous people. Her monologue is an affirmation of a new and decolonized identity,

> you are sri lankhan christian daughter of the
> dutch east india company you want no more Albrecht no more
> rape in your pelvis no more *where'd you get that name* no more
> *are you adopted* no more. ("Wrong is not yours" 68)

She deconstructs her identity and ancestral experiences by rewriting her personal history. She separates herself from a colonial heritage associated with trauma endured by her Burgher, Sri-Lankan ancestors in the form of exploitation and abuse by white men of the Dutch East India company. She ends the poem by validating her efforts to decolonize her personality as she writes,

> your name is not wrong
> wrong is not your name
> it is your own
> your own. (69)

Such poems reflect the impact colonial values that have become a part of South Asian identities. She recognizes the hindrances these values have created in development and expression of their personalities. In her poem "Partition", Fatimah Asghar articulates the difficulties faced by people in diaspora when Western forces suppress immigrant identities. Asghar speaks on behalf of brown people from South Asia who cannot be true to their national identities due to the fear of discrimination created by colonizers. She says that you can be Kashmiri, Indian or Pakistani until external forces take over to control and divide their land ("Partition" 9). Imperialism has such a strong impact in changing South Asian people that, "no one remembers the road that brings you back". Colonizers deprive natives of the freedom to enjoy their own culture but they exercise the freedom for culture appropriation of South Asia where "british captains spit *paki* as they sip your chai, add so much foam you can't taste home" (9). They alienate their regional and ancestral languages by filling your mouth with english and you can only recognize your languages when your relatives speak. She says that imperialism contributes to erasure of personal and collective histories of natives especially since immigrants are physically detached from their native cultural realities and immersed in Western settings. Both Western and Eastern lifestyles conflict with each other for instance Asghar says,

> you're a virgin until you get too drunk. you're a muslim until you're not a virgin. you're a pakistani until they start throwing acid. you're a muslim until it's too dangerous. you're safe until you're alone. you're american until the towers fall. until there's a border on your back ("Partition" 9).

Asghar further explains such conflict immigrants are forced to face when acknowledging their national and ethnic origins. In her stylistically unique poem "From", she exposes the political consequences of living in a colonizer's country (Asghar 27). It also shows the implications of answering questions about an immigrant's identity.

What They Say	How They Say It	What They Actually Mean
Where are you from?	A short cut to the end, could be a period. a lovesong if they weren't locking a drone on target.	You must not be from here. So, where are you from?
آپ کہاں سے ہیں؟	Aap kahaa se hai?	There is a wrong answer
आप कहां से हैं	Aap kahaa se hai?	There is a wrong accent
تسیں کتھوں ہو؟	Tusi kitho ho?	How did you forget? How will you remember?

("From" 27)

Asghar does not need to mention who the speaker is because simply mentioning the way in which the speaker asks where the other person is from implies that they do not belong. There is a distinct division that separates white westerners from immigrants, but similar divisions are also found within immigrant communities in diaspora. Whether the question is asked in Urdu, Hindi or Punjabi plays an important role in determining the bias. Different South Asian ethnic and religious communities coexisted for centuries before colonization. But after colonizers left the region, a process of recolonization occurred which led to the establishment of fundamentalist movements that foregrounded boundaries of nationalism, race, ethnicity and religion within the colonized communities (Mohanty 2-3). Therefore, something as simple as answering a question in a particular language, manner or accent is associated with a particular group which determines the bias in their responses. There is a sense of optimism when she mentions that this interaction could be a "lovesong" but it is not possible as Western countries are still "locking a drone on target". But in the last response Asghar calls back to their origin and home through a reminder, "How did you forget? / How will you remember?" (27). According to Frantz Fanon, there is an anxiety among colonized people regarding possible racial attacks therefore they must constantly be attentive about their image and protect their position (Fanon 238). This last part is where Asghar attempts to transcend the limitations of marginalized discourse by reestablishing a connection with common historical roots of precolonial identities.

Asghar also tries to deconstruct colonial aspects that define her identity in her poem "Oil" (Asghar 49). She describes the difficulties of decolonization as an immigrant woman. After the death of her parents, she lives with her adoptive relatives like "…My Auntie A, / not-blood but could be, / runs oil through my scalp" in their house that "smells like badaam" that "My Uncle Fuzzy, not-blood but could be, / soaks them in a bowl of water" ("Oil" 49). The description of the house settings reflects cultural attachment to their homeland. She mentions mundane parts of her life that connect to her heritage through different household items. She asks her aunt about her parent's ethnicity,

> My Auntie A says my people might
> be Afghani. I draw a ship on the map.
>
> I write *Afghani* under its hull. I count
> all the oceans, blood & not-blood,
>
> all the people I could be,
> the whole map, my mirror. (49)

Even though she writes "Afghani", she does not use it to define herself but gives that name to a ship that explores all the oceans. She allows herself to explore her identity free from geographical restrictions. But there is a quick shift in her attitude towards her own self after the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade center. She "crossed the ship / out on the map" and "buried it under a casket of scribbles" because "all the people (she) could be are dangerous" ("Oil" 51). Declaration of "war on terror" was similar in pattern to European colonial invasions based on the civilization mission (Assayag 254). This impacted the daily lives of ordinary people, especially in the portrayal of South Asian and Arab people by Western media. Asghar shows the impact it had on how she was alienated and judged differently when, "The kids at school ask me where I'm from & I have no answer" ("Oil" 54). Immigrants experienced shame and fear in owning up to their identities similar to the way in which becomes a reason for Asghar to hide her identity at school. She says she could not say the word "blow" or anything related to a bomb due to the biased association with terrorism regardless her origin or involvement. White people have the liberty to use language without repercussions of being mistaken or misconstrued unlike people of color. Asghar says,

> "They all make English their own, say *that's the bomb*. / I know that word'
> not meant for me." (54)

This reflects the contradiction between Western discourse used by white people and the same discourse used by people of color giving different connotations. White people use phrases like "*that's the bomb*" as a compliment for something great but people of color cannot use the same words in fear of discrimination and bullying. But a small act by Asghar as a child turns exhibits her resistance through language when she says,

> I practice at night, the crater
> it makes of my mouth. I whisper to my sheets
> *bombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbomb*
> a little symphony, so round. I look up & make sure no one heard. (54)

She presents more examples of contemporary imperialism in her poem "The Land Where My Father Died". She highlights the irony underlying patriotic discourse promoting America as a land of greatness even when it continues to promote colonial patterns to maintain a dominant position in the name of globalization. The poem is written in pattern similar to the American national anthem. In a singular continuous rhythmic flow, she lists new forms of colonialism in America from the perspective of the "other",

> "land of buildings & no good manners land of sunless people & offspring of colonizers land of no spice & small pox land of fake flowers land of shackle & branches made of rope land of wire fences grabbing sky land" ("The Land Where my Father Died" 55).

She criticizes the industrial growth in America where there are a large number of buildings and "sunless people & offspring of colonizers" who have "no good manners" and "no spice" (55). It exposes the irony of the civilization mission where colonization was justified because white people were going to teach colonized people how to be civilized even though they are not as civilized as they present themselves. In reality, colonizers only brought difficulties to colonized lands, including 'small pox' which never existed in the Americas prior to 1633 when large settlements from Europe arrived there (Berman).

The depiction of America written by Asghar is not picturesque or romantic but instead she calls it "land of fake flowers land of shackle & branches… made of rope land of wire fences grabbing sky". She says that this "land of fake flowers… shackle & branches made of rope" is not only ruining the natural state of the world, but replacing it with brutality extended towards humans living in it ("The Land Where My Father Died" 55).

Further on, Asghar indicates the increase in criminalization and persecution of immigrants and people of color in America as,

> "land that mispronounces by grief land that skins my other land that laughs when my people die & paints targets on my future children's faces land that steals & says *mine* land." (55)

She says that this land "mispronounces (her) grief" even though the legal system of this land "skins (her) other land". They laugh when her people die and mispronounce her grief while they place targets on her "future children's faces" in order to continue stealing their land and resources. She blames this land for poisoning her mother and "devouring her body" (55).

So, Western countries like America exert their power through brute force in other countries to control their resources while they promote hierarchal power dynamics by oppressing others in their own country. Asghar reflects on the various ways Americans oppress people of color and immigrants throughout the world. Colonizers invade other lands and claim it as their own after killing native people and generationally targeting their children. This poem brings out the irony in the discovery and establishment of the United States of America as European colonizers invaded Native American land, killed them and continue to discriminate and target their future generations while they claim ownership of America as their own. Even after the death and brutal experiences of many people, colonizers in the West pursue imperialism by alienating colonized nations from their culture and language. Asghar says that this land has made her "other" language strange on her own tongue and alienates South Asians from their own cultural identities as they, "stripped our saris & clips" The end of the poem reveals that America is only protective towards the security of its "*home*land" while it continues to "eliminate cities" of other lands (55). She acknowledges the emotions associated with the trauma caused by America. She

reveals the irony in justification of violence by America throughout the world which contrasts with the image presented of American greatness through Western discourse.

3.3 Racial Bias

Racial bias is a major theme found in most of the selected poems. Race and the color of people's skin are a determining factor in discrimination against colonized countries. Racism and racialization are rooted in colonization. It has been used as means to alienate other races from white people on the basis of difference. This difference is equated to danger of the unknown by the colonizers in order to maintain power that allows them to control and subjugate others.

In her poem "this is what I know about crazy", Piepzna-Samarasinha talks about Western countries calling her people crazy. South Asians and other colonized people of color were considered uncivilized and animalistic in contrast to the civilized white people with their etiquettes and mannerisms. Piepzna-Samarasinha says that her crazy is not "the beloved crazy of fancy white dead men" but it is "dirty / innocent / writhing" ("this is what I know about crazy" 42). She reassesses the insults used to describe her people by shifting the perspective to acceptance. She accepts her people for the way they are and says, "we love ourselves it's dirty / underground / and gorgeous" even though they face racism from all kinds of people. She says that they are feared, hated and loved by the police, doctors, their own families and even strangers on the street (42-43). She hints the anti-immigrant narratives and depictions in media portraying them as criminals or terrorists. As a result, immigrants are more likely to face police brutality and severe punishments (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco). All of these aspects influence the way immigrants treat each other and their own families.

Moreover, racism and ethnic discrimination affect the daily lives of immigrant women playing a crucial role in how a woman of color views herself. But colonialism has also contributed to this bias by setting a Eurocentric standard of beauty. In her untitled poem, Kaur questions these racialized beauty standards through a critical thinking and self-reflection that Mohanty considers necessary in order to decolonize cognition. Kaur writes,

why are you so unkind to me
my body cries
cause you don't look like them
i tell her. (62)

She reflects on this internal conflict rooted in how she views herself for being different from "them". Kaur also reveals her own bias and struggles with her body image. In another untitled poem, she states that she has "reduced her body to aesthetics" and declared that it was a "grand failure for not looking like theirs" (78). Thus, racial bias is not just externally influenced by the perceptions of white people but it also affects how women of color look at themselves.

The compulsion to conform to standards of beauty set by white women has developed a lucrative beauty industry. It convinces women of color that they need to change their appearances in order to be socially accepted and to be beautiful. Kaur exposes the truth that the beauty industry is a capitalist Western construct that highlights insecurities of women all over the world. She sums it up in an untitled poem comprising a single stanza,

> "it is a trillion-dollar industry that would collapse / if we believed we were beautiful enough already" (Kaur 224).

She further mentions the extent to which women are willing to go to alter their appearance in her poem "basement aesthetician". Many women of color are unable undergo expensive beauty procedures unlike white women. They resort to basement salons that are made for and by brown women. She narrates her experience at one such place where women, who were her mother's age, looked nothing like her "simple mother". All the women with brown skin would dye their hair lighter which Kaur describes as, "yellow hair meant for white skin / streaks like zebras / slits for eyebrows" ("basement aesthetician" 80). She would look at her own eyebrows feel shame as they looked like caterpillars. She dreams for them to look thin like the women in the salon who were following trends of white women. She describes shame associated with her body hair that covers her like "velvet" (80). She does not want the male gaze to see her in as aesthetically undesirable. Though natural, body hair is considered unfeminine. White women, especially in pop culture, are shown to be hairless or with lighter colored body hair that is less prominent against their skin

color. Whereas women of color tend to grow more body hair which is darker in color and more prominent. Furthermore, darker and thicker body hair plays a part in class discrimination as it has been associated with lower classes. Thus, women of color feel shame and undergo various, mostly painful, hair removal procedures to appear more desirable and less masculine. Towards the end of the poem, Kaur questions these beautification procedures, "why do i do this / why do i punish my body / for being exactly as its meant to be" ("basement aesthetician" 81). She seems to show more acceptance towards her body for being the way it is naturally meant to be.

On the other hand, Fatimah Asghar shows the ways in which her own body image is shaped by racist behaviors and bias towards brown women. She narrates her experience of being bullied for her appearance in school. She says that someone wrote "anthrax" on her locker comparing her skin to symptoms of livestock disease. She kept her body mist in that locker because a white girl named Alexandra said that she smelled musty. Her brown skin is considered dirty while whiter complexions represent purity and cleanliness. Boys laugh at her and someone asks her when she last showered. The next stanza is written upside down where Asghar repeatedly tries to convince herself and others through affirmations like "I did / I'm not" as in she did take a shower and she is not musty or dirty. She tries to find different responses to bullying so she could "harden & no one'll touch me" or "laugh along". But the shame is so overwhelming that she cannot go to her locker because she cannot look at those words written on metal. Even if she feels the urge to react, she finds it difficult to do so due to the fear of being bullied even more. So, she sprays herself with body mist, plans to wash her clothes when she gets home and says that she will shower before school the next day so that the boys don't laugh at her. She finds it easier to accept the bias white children show her and takes measures to avoid giving them an excuse to complain in the future. This affects her self-image and self-esteem ("Oil 52).

3.4 Anti-Capitalist Critique

Capitalism has greatly influenced hierarchies of Western countries. Their position of power is strengthened through economic control of wealth and resources. A major factor that supports the continual exploitation of Third World regions like South Asia is colonialist mentality. Colonial reign over South Asian internalized the idea that people of color were financially dependent on white people. White people

established the impression of being the only competent authority that could handle the resources and wealth of colonized countries. This perception is still propagated through classism where immigrants are deprived of equal opportunities in the West to financially improve themselves. There is an instinctive bias against brown people who are considered economically weaker than white people.

Piepzna-Samarasinha shows the difference between first and second generation immigrant women's racialized fears through their behaviors. In her poem "what kind of ancestor do you want to be?" she reflects on class struggle of a brown woman in contrast to her white mother (88). She says that her mother was rude to sales clerks and did not comfortably chat with them. She would power lock her doors because she was afraid working class immigrants would attack her. On the other hand, Piepzna-Samarasinha "grew up / to be that lady who tips 30%", carries herself with confidence and dresses freely regardless of her physical disability. Unlike her mother, she is more comfortable socializing and assimilating in America. She is friendlier in a manner that caters to Western civilization as she says "please and thank you / yes ma'am and yes sir", compliments others, and is charitable. As opposed to the fear of being deprived or snatched of their resources, the poet expresses her desire to be resourceful and share those resources with others including food, clothing, medication and home necessities like blankets and couches "for anyone who needs them" ("what kind of ancestor do you want to be?" 88). Immediately, she says her mother would not do the same as she "would clutch her purse at me / think I'm low class / for being nice to receptionists, flight attendants, janitors and waitresses" (88-89).

The poet understands the necessity of being resourceful and exhibits solidarity with those who go through similar class struggles, especially women of color, while her mother is concerned with her own safety and survival of primary importance. Her kindness and hospitality contrasts with her mother's fearful inhibitions. Piepzna-Samarasinha believes in solidarity and resourcefulness as means of sharing among a community that is struggling against capitalism. She also fears that her mother will die because she will not have someone to help her in an hour of need. This reflects the sense of solidarity the immigrant communities share as they support and help each other regardless of their class struggles. But "every kind of white fear" has embedded racial bias in her mother that if she is "too nice to brown folks / they'll kill…" or rob her ("what kind of ancestor do you want to be?" 89). This is the bias her mother has

adopted from dominant white narrative that non-white races are dangerous. She considers it better for her daughter to "just become middle class" if she wants to continue showing solidarity, even though she hates the middle class and believes that they will always hate her too. Also, the racialized class that is the focus of her mother's bias is mostly middle class. She is told that if she loses the grip on her purse, she will be killed by these middle class people of color (89). This poem presents a critique of feminist practices in two ways; one being through everyday actions and the other being through collective actions based on feminist ideologies of social opportunities (Mohanty 5). Women of color show more solidarity and understanding of capitalistic structures in Western countries as compared to white women, even if they are from the same family.

Moreover, white people assimilate in to the repressive racist and capitalist systems. They refuse to acknowledge the labor and economic struggles of immigrants. Piepzna-Samarasinha advises immigrants to start acknowledging their own efforts instead of seeking validation from white people. In the poem "everyone thinks you're so lazy. don't let them" she appreciates the energy immigrants invest to earn a living and survive in foreign countries. She tells them to own their work as their own because it is "labour not paid not union" so they should make sure they "get paid what (they) are worth". She exposes the prejudice against immigrants when white people dismiss their efforts and call them lazy. She says that they should make sure they work hard and prove "our survival is / the opposite of lazy" ("everyone thinks you're so lazy. don't let them" 24).

In her poem, "advice i would've given to my mother on her wedding day", Kaur mentions the sacrifices first generation immigrant women of color make to survive. She builds her poem on the premise of various pieces of advice she would have given her mother on her wedding day. In the second half of the poem, Kaur highlights the ways in which immigrant families struggle in foreign countries monetarily to secure their children's future. Economic frugality becomes a norm in such households. Generally, women are the ones who are not given financial autonomy as dependents of men. In the ninth point of the poem, Kaur tells her mother that she is "allowed to spend / a couple of dollars on a coffee" ("advice i would've given to my mother on her wedding day" 134). Many women of color are not permitted the liberties of fulfilling their personal wishes especially because they

cannot afford it. But she wants her mother to allow herself to spend some money on herself and regain some financial autonomy. In the tenth point of the poem, Kaur acknowledges the guilt and shame associated with lack of financial freedom where "other mothers with their / flashy phones and designer clothing" provided a contrast to her mother's inability to speak fluent English or operate a cell phone or computer. She does not blame her mother but blames the structural limitations of patriarchal houses which Kaur describes as:

> "we confined you to the four walls of this home / and worked you to the bone / you have not been your own property for decades." (134)

The situational irony becomes apparent when materialism of the country they live in contrasts with the patriarchal values enforced in their household. Women are treated as property owned by men. Before marriage they belong to their fathers, after marriage they become the property of their husband and children.

Similarly, Fatimah Asghar discusses South Asian traditions in marriage including brideprices and dowry in her poem "Shadi", which means "wedding/marriage" in Urdu and Hindi. She discusses the treatment of women as capitalist commodities. She elaborates the context of the poem in a short caption about the Partition of the Sub-continent when, "75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted and raped" and these women either by force married or voluntarily stayed with their abductors because they could not return back to their communities. The worth of women was quantified in terms of monetary value. In rural areas, they were told that their worth was equal to animals and objects, "we've had our worth told to us since always / two goats & maybe a nose ring or a bracelet" ("Shadi" 37). Women were bought and sold like livestock by their responsible patriarchs. Brideprices were the amount paid by the husband in return for a woman's reproductive abilities, domestic labor and in ancient times it was also considered payment for her virginity (Anderson 158). These payments were made based on social status and class therefore people from rural areas would use livestock as payment and it determined the worth of the women. Furthermore, many abducted women were forced in to prostitution to gain monetary profit from them ("Abducted Women"). Asghar thus, highlights the effort of relearning to reassess the influence of capitalism in colonial South Asian history of women. She uses an optimistic tone to change the perspective of valuing

women in terms of capitalist commodities and wishes to eliminate “the threats of our uncles / selling us off” to married men with round bellies (“Shadi” 37). In this way, she provides anti-capitalistic critique on treatment of women as commodities for capitalistic profit.

Furthermore, capitalism still retains a strong hold on South Asian families and women. The financial struggle at the time of partition had an adverse impact on households. Where many people were forced to move then, even now when willingly South Asians immigrate to other countries they face difficulties as a result of capitalism. Asghar shares experiences of her family’s financial struggles in America in her poem “Old Country”. Her family would save up money to go to the Old Country Buffet. They would spend the whole day there continuously eating and filling the Tupperware they “smuggled” in. Even when the kids would beg and whine or when the waitresses threatened to charge extra money, they “weren’t leaving / until my greedy ass family had their fill” (31). It was the only place where they were allowed to eat as much as they wanted without being “accused of being wasteful” by their husbands. The patriarchal setup of the household shows that “husbands” control the economic dynamics of the house and make the members “eat all the meat” on their plates. If they fail to comply, they are called “wasteful”. This shows what Mohanty considers “women as universal dependents” (Mohanty 24) and “married women as victims of the colonial process” (Mohanty 26). Third World women are scrutinized from the context of their familial especially marital relations. They are told to finish their food or the women in particular would get “as many pimples as rice we left behind” (“Old Country Buffet” 31). So, the husbands also criticize the physical appearance of women in relation to the consumption of food. This places her in a subordinate position within her marriage due to the systematic power relations of husband and wife (Mohanty 27). The financial and physical struggles of a brown immigrant family in America contrast with abundance of food in white-dominant places like the Old Country Buffet. They consume their food wisely instead of “wasting” it like Americans which shows the racial and socioeconomic hierarchies of Americans and brown immigrants. Food in abundance is accumulated and exhibited in all-American places like these buffets where they “ate & ate & snuck food in their Tupperware” (“Old Country Buffet” 30). So, first world countries like America have

the potential to feed it's people but they do not do so to maintain their dominant position in the global capitalist system.

In context of this poem, Asghar's family is able to enjoy "the American / way of waste" which is something they cannot enjoy otherwise. Racialized capitalism in America favors white Americans allows accumulation of resources beyond their own needs. This unbalanced hierarchy creates a gap in provision of basic resources like food to the working class, especially immigrant people of color. Children of such families have only seen an immense variety of American dishes on television. At such buffets, they get to indulge in the American food culture of "mythical foods". American children complain about these foods at school while scoffing at the biryani brown kids bring for lunch ("Old Country Buffet" 31). Bias towards anything "foreign" exhibits the nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments of Americans (Mohanty 9). Non-American food and culture is mocked and brown children are bullied by American children at school for their cultural and economic choices.

Regardless of the class divide, Asghar's family stay at the buffet till dinner and eat till they feel like they have gained ten pounds and loosen the drawstrings in their *shalwar*. Asghar seems to satirically point out the gluttony and increasing obesity in America due to their food culture. Eventually, her family is asked to leave but she feels like, "we learned how to be American & say: / we got the money // we are here to stay" ("Old Country Buffet" 32).

In Piepzna-Samarasinha's "everytime I see you I think // *what the hell was I thinking?*" reveals the ways in which white people, especially men, pursue women of color eagerly. Where women of color like Leah want to work nonprofit movement jobs for certain social causes, white men use their privilege to get those jobs depriving such women of the socioeconomic opportunity. She uses the word "white bois" for these men (13). "The bois" is slang for "the boys" specifically used in for a predominantly male group of shared disposition, who try hard to present a counter-image of themselves and oftentimes include one female called 'token female' to add diversity to their group ("Top definition – The Bois"). This suggests white bois, who work for nonprofit organizations, pursue women of color to add diversity to their predominantly white male institutions. Colonialist discourses target women by subjecting and benefitting from their work in a way that is vital to their nation. Their

independence threatens both colonist and patriarchal structures so they collaborate in order to keep women in their place. Overlapping of ideologies includes patriarchy, race, class and/or colonialism (Loomba *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 222). "White bois" reflect the same colonizer mentality that was exhibited during the colonization of South Asia. Regardless of class or race, women were used for the service of the white, upper-class, modern, colonial man who possessed authority, power and competence (Lugones 743). Back then, colonizers used the civilization mission to influence memory, identity, sense of self, land, and spirituality to justify its own means and agendas. Now they have modified the method of colonization and naturally centralized capitalism in conjunction to modern concepts of gender (Lugones 745). Historically, the elements of racialization and capitalist exploitation are inextricably interlinked within the power system of capitalism, which is anchored in colonization of the Americas (Quijano qtd. in Lugones 745).

Piepzna-Samarsinha shifts the perspective of subject-object/male-female relations and compares "white bois" to "whole foods take out". "Whole foods take out" is an option only considered when "you are too tired / to cook your own food". They charge a large sum for a "tasteless version of your culture / that promises it won't kill you" ("everytime I see you I think // *what the hell was I thinking?*" 13). The inadequacy of try-hard white bois and generally American white males who capitalize an ex-colony's culture is evident. Furthermore, she provides an anti-imperialist critique on American capitalism and colonization. American capitalist system continues to use cultural appropriation to profit themselves while depriving immigrants of jobs or economic benefit from their own culture. Thus, immigrants and people of color have to budget in order to meet their financial requirements. But they find themselves disappointed when they have to buy a bland version of their country's food with a large debit charge that exceeds their budget. Paying this large sum seems justified to the poet for two reasons; one being the satisfaction of a longing for her homeland; and the other being able to dispose of the leftovers of that bland food which will eventually decompose and no longer exist ("everytime I see you I think // *what the hell was I thinking?*" 14).

From a standpoint of decolonization, this poem and particularly the last stanza indicates Piepzna-Samarasinha's rethinking and questioning of the colonial capitalist legacy. She exposes the reality of colonial culture propagated by white males to

maintain patriarchal power structures. The imagery shows the ways in which white men of America still consider women as tools to maintain and exploit their position of power. These men use cultural appropriation and traditions of colonized nations and immigrants to facilitate what Mohanty calls capitalist agendas that favor the U.S. and Europe (Mohanty 9). But there is hope in Piepzna-Samarasinha's tone when she indicates that the result of this particular capitalist venture is a "greasy crunched compostable box" ("everytime I see you I think // *what the hell was I thinking?*" 14). Maybe U.S. capitalism and imperialism will eventually end in decomposition through decolonization. Until then, Piepzna-Samarasinha suggests immigrants acknowledge the effort they put in to earn a living and survive in foreign countries in the poem "everyone thinks you're so lazy. don't let them". She tells them to own their work as their own because it is "labour not paid not union" so they should make sure they "get paid what (they) are worth". She exposes the prejudice against immigrants when white people dismiss their efforts and call them lazy. She says that they should make sure they work hard and prove "our survival is / the opposite of lazy" (24).

3.5 Feminist Practices and Solidarity

Feminist practices range from individual everyday actions to collective ideologies of feminism expressed through actions and social opportunities. These practices can be explored through individual identities, and social or communal relationships (Mohanty 5). Literary practices run parallel to feminist practices where ideas and experiences related to feminism are articulated. Whether consciously or unconsciously, many female writers incorporate feminist themes and discuss various feminist practices in their lives through autobiographical reflections. Literary texts can include, support and even challenge feminism (Madsen xi).

Fatimah Asghar articulates various feminist practices and experiences in her poem "Shadi". In the caption before the poem, she mentions violence against women including abductions and rape during the Partition of the sub-continent. In this context, she uses feminist discourse to share struggles against oppression of South Asian women at that time with the underlying theme of solidarity. Her narrative presents a rewriting of regional history from a feminist point of view, sharing realities of women who were victims of violence. She uses first person pronoun in plural form "we" expressing collective historical experience. Asghar says that women have been

told that their worth is equal to two goats and a few items of jewelry ("Shadi" 37). Their worth was dependent on the amount of dowry given by the family of the bride or brideprices paid by the groom. Asghar questions these standards indicates a collective effort of relearning. Relearning is encouraged by Mohanty as well in terms of solidarity in decolonization as individual and combined efforts to reform identities of women resulting in self-transformation (Mohanty 8). So, their identities will develop beyond the limitations of their gender. She is hopeful for these women to be known for their names and "more than a body". It will be possible for women escape the threats of men from their families including "…the threats of our uncles / selling us off to some man" with a round belly who already has many wives ("Shadi" 37).

She also hopes for a community of women when their names will be prioritized instead of derogatory labels like "*butameez*" and "*whore"* ("Shadi" 37). It shows how men verbally demean or belittle women, even in own family. In case a woman chooses to object mistreatment she is called *"butameez*" which means "rude" in Urdu/Hindi. She is labelled a "*whore*" for expressing her desires.

The last three lines of this poem indicate a history of harassment and neglect that women faced at the time of partition. These instances are still relevant for South Asian women. Asghar highlights the unacknowledged domestic labor of women. In the caption of "*Shadi*", she mentions abductions and rape of women. They had to stay with their abductors and rapists by choice or by force because society would reject them if they moved out or ran away. Women endured abundant trauma to cope with these situations. They are the first ones to wake up but the last ones to be fed. They were continuously sexually assaulted with no space for consent. At the end of the poem, Asghar wishes women do not have to relive such history (37). She shows solidarity with these women expressing collective history of oppression which Mohanty considers to be more of a Western view of Third World feminism based on commonality of oppression. Women are categorized on the basis of same oppressive experiences where they were powerless, exploited and sexually harassed (Mohanty 22-23).

Similarly, in her poem "the art of growing" Rupi Kaur writes about the struggle of being sexualized and objectified by men at the tender age of twelve,

immediately after reaching puberty “when my body began to ripen like new fruit”. The behavior of men immediately changed when “the boys didn’t want to play tag at recess / they wanted to touch all the new / and unfamiliar part of me”. She faced harassment as a preteen who began to associate shame with her natural biological development. She did not know how to carry herself and felt shame in her body. This shame forced her to hide her body as she “tried to bury in my rib cage” (94). Harassment and objectification made it a challenge to cope with these changes as men were the ones to label her changing body and call out,

> *boobs*
> they said
> and i hated that word
> hated that i was embarrassed to say it
> that even though it was referring to my body
> it didn’t belong to me
> it belonged to them. (“the art of growing” 94)

The word “*boobs*” is slang used mostly by men to label breasts of women. Etymologically, the word emerged from Puritanical Western culture as there was a lot of shame and shyness surrounding topics of sexuality. It originated from the word “puppa” used in Germanic and Latin languages referring to “little girl” (McKelle). This indicates a history of sexualization in the use of slang labelling bodies of women and even little girls. Kaur despises this vocabulary particularly in reference to her own body because she is embarrassed. It makes her feel like she is no longer in control of her own body and it’s ownership belongs to “them”, the men. Men are vocal about their desires because they openly tell her, “*boobs* / he said / *let me see yours*” exerting dominance and ownership over her body. She feels “guilt and shame” and believes “there is nothing worth seeing here” (“the art of growing” 94).

Since the patriarchal system gives men significant privilege and power, their language is influenced by entitlement over women. Their language is a tool used to implement their will. Kaur depicts this through the powerful image of a man who demands to see her breasts forcing her to feel shame and guilt about her body. He proceeds to use his “hooked fingers” to touch her inappropriately without her consent. “He charges to feast” submitting to his sexual desires even if it means violating the

bodily autonomy of a woman. In this scenario, Kaur is only able to oppose by biting in to his forearm. In that moment she decides "*i hate this body* / i must have done something terrible to deserve it" (94). Her bodily autonomy is linked to her guilt, shame and ultimate hatred. The existence of female body is so sexualized that Kaur considers it punishment for something terrible she must have done. The male perpetrator is not held accountable so the victim is left to blame herself.

In many cases of sexual violence, harassment and abuse, the shame and guilt prevents women from sharing their experiences. In this poem, Kaur shares this incident with her mother to which the latter responds, "*the men outside are starving*" so "i must not dress with my breasts hanging". So the root of the problem is traced back to the way in which she dresses. The responsibility of harassment by men is compared to them "starving". As a result, women should dress appropriately and "sit with (their) legs closed" otherwise "*the boys will get hungry in they see fruit*". Her mother tells her to "just learn to act like a lady" and behave "like a women oughta" otherwise she will have to deal with consequences where "men will get angry and fight" (95). But Kaur challenges this response by saying,

> I can't wrap my head around the fact
> that I have to convince half of the world's population
> my body is not their bed
> I am busy learning the consequences of womanhood. ("the art of growing" 95)

She thinks about the manners and behaviors of women that cater to the needs of men. She draws critical attention to male lust when she writes, "my body is not their bed". She is required to learn the "consequences of womanhood" when she believes she should be paying attention to educating herself in science and math. She claims to enjoys physical sports like gymnastics and doing cartwheels but she cannot enjoy them if she is supposed to keep her "thighs pressed together / like they're hiding a secret". She addresses the taboo around topics of female body and sexuality where women are not expected to openly discuss anything related to their body, especially in South Asian culture, "as if the acceptance of my own body parts / will invite thoughts of lust in their heads." Kaur challenges patriarchal ideas by rejecting norms that promote body shaming, harassment and rape. She says, "i will not subject myself to their ideology / cause slut shaming is rape culture / virgin praising is rape culture."

Patriarchal discourse of shame and guilt related to female sexuality including "slut shaming" become a part of "rape culture" as virgins are praised for their virtue while women who accept their sexuality and body are called "sluts" ("the art of growing" 95). Calling of derogatory names and objectification of women is a part of rape culture. The value of a woman is associated with her body, sexuality and the manner in which she conducts herself before men. Men have the power to determine the labels for women. Kaur repudiates this as a form of "rape culture". Rape culture means violence against women is sexualized and considered normal ("Rape Culture"). She also talks about objectification of her body using the metaphor of a "mannequin in the window / of your favorite shop",

> you can't dress me up or
> throw me out when i am worn
> you are not a cannibal
> your actions are not my responsibility
> you will control yourself. ("the art of growing" 95-96)

She liberates herself from patriarchal authority over her lifestyle choices. She eliminates oppressive limitations that were imposed on her since she was a girl. Kaur refuses to dress herself in a particular way because of the male gaze and intentions of "throw(ing)" her when she is "worn". She removes the responsibility of abuse and harassment from the victims and holds men accountable for their actions. In the context of violence, Mohanty calls men "subjects-who-perpetrate-violence" when women are considered as "objects-who-defend-themselves" (Mohanty 24). It is their responsibility to control themselves instead of controlling women or the way they dress themselves.

Another feminist subject Kaur refers is responsibility in relation to accountability. Women are mostly held accountable for not only their own actions but also the actions of others towards them. Burden of responsibility falls on them whereas men are not required to take control in considering their actions or consequences of their actions. She points out these double standards in favor of equal accountability for men as it is for women. Furthermore, she is exhibits determination against harassment by saying,

the next time i go to school
and the boys hoot at my backside
i push them down
foot over their necks
and defiantly say
boobs
and the look in their eyes is priceless. ("the art of growing" 96)

In this way, she takes control of the male-dominant discourse of power. Instead of complying with the typical image of a submissive Third World woman, she actively opposes their violent actions and words. Where the slang "*boobs*" is used in a derogatory manner by men, Kaur uses it to empower herself and acknowledge her bodily autonomy. Overall, these autobiographical experiences of Rupi Kaur address the theme of feminist practices by drawing attention to male privilege, male gaze, entitlement, sexual harassment, rape, victim blaming, bodily autonomy, body shaming, sexuality and responses to patriarchal norms related to suppression of female biological needs.

Finally, practicing solidarity plays a significant role in decolonizing feminist practices and experiences by developing a sense of community or belonging to a collective group. It is not similar to sisterhood where women are grouped together on the basis of common oppression. Rather it acknowledges common ground, accountability and recognition of common interests. This allows women of color, especially from Third World countries, to feel inclusive while respecting their differences and diversities. Combined efforts work individually and combine in favor of political mobilization, identity reformation and self-transformation (Mohanty 7).

Kaur practices solidarity at an individual level, starting from home and with her mother in her poem "advice I would've given my mother on her wedding day". In this poem, dependency relations, solidarity and feminist rethinking of identity are described through struggles of her mother. She writes the poem in the form of thirteen different points. She does not feel the need to relieve her mother's traumatic experiences. She even encourages her mother to engage in feminist practices by making her more aware of her choices which were otherwise suppressed by patriarchy (133).

Typically, Third World women are considered meek, timid and subordinates to their dominant male counterparts, but Kaur says in the very first point that she would empower her mother with the simple option of saying no. Since South Asian families predominantly follow the patriarchal cultural setup, women of the house are taught to comply with every demand and order they are given by men. Women are expected to follow orders of men, willingly or unwillingly. Oftentimes, she has to face violent consequences if she refuses to comply. Other times, without fault she is the victim of male aggression and domestic abuse. But Kaur's second point specifies another aspect of the toxic cycle of domestic abuse where her father was beat by his father. This is normalized and becomes a generational cycle of abuse. Abuse stems from toxic masculinity where men exert their power even if it means violence. Emotional displays by men are considered weak in patriarchal societies. Even if they do have feelings of love, they fail to express them in order to maintain a strong front of masculinity. Kaur says that her father was also brought up to be a South Asian patriarch, so he cannot express his love but he will show it through his actions. Furtheron, in the third point Kaur encourages women to accept love. Patriarchal values suggest inferiority of women so they are treated like lesser humans. They get used to unfair treatment so they are unable to accept love and affection. Kaur wants her mother to accept love and also embrace her sexuality. Sexuality is extremely taboo in South Asia, particularly female sexuality. The chastity of a woman is very important. Her character determines her place and worth in society. Kaur wants her mother, and women in general, to accept their sexuality and not consider it "dirty" ("advice I would've given my mother on her wedding day" 133).

In the fourth point, she raises her voice against familial pressure and unfair treatment of women. Sons are given more importance and female infanticide was a common practice in South Asia. The pressure of birthing a male offspring is so high that women are told to abort girls before they are born. Kaur says that she is glad her mother gave birth to her regardless of familial opposition. She tells her mother to shut such relatives out because her mother's decisions do not need to be controlled by society or its norms. Her mother does not need to worry about her father's disapproval because she is sure, "He will not hate you" (133).

Kaur reminds her mother that she has an independent identity of her own. She tells her mother to bring all her art, journals and paintings from before she was

married and before she moved to America. She wants her to remember who she is and where she came from for times when she feels "lost amid new cities". In this way she will also leave a legacy for her children to remember her beyond her role as a mother. She wants her mother to develop relationships with other women. Here, belonging to a community of shared female solidarity will help her develop an individual and group identity. Women should not feel isolated in their homes when their men leave the house to earn. Kaur emphasizes on the importance of having female friendships and a community so her mother does not feel lonely. She says that these relationships are dependable and women can rely on each other even in matters of life and death (133).

She convinces her mother that she is much more than her role as a mother. Kaur does not want her to sacrifice her wellbeing for her husband and children because they will "take from (her) plate… emotionally and mentally starve" her and that is "wrong". She acknowledges the efforts her mother made to raise her family in a strange land all by herself ("advice i would've given my mother on her wedding day" 134). Moving to a foreign country exposes women to alien conditions but women continue to raise their families against the odds without any guidance or support. But Kaur is there to support her mother and recognize her as "the first women in (her) lineage" to raise her family the way she did. In the last five points, she praises her mother as the person who she looks up to the most and who gives her strength (135). She wants make her mother's life easier after all that she has been through. She acknowledges the strength of her mother and calls her "hero of heroes" and even "god of gods". She looks up to her mother as an inspiration. In this way she articulates her acknowledgement of her mother's struggles in diaspora, particularly against patriarchal values and Indian culture. Through the example of her mother, she describes her mother as a typical Third World Woman who is reduced to her familial roles and relationships within patriarchal boundaries. She suggests that she would have advised her mother to exercise her rights and make her own choices rather than prescribed norms.

In a more general way, her poem "progress" contains the theme of practicing solidarity through feminist empowerment. She believes it is possible to empower the next generation of women through the current work that is being produced. This will consequently become their legacy where benefits are not limited to an individual or a

particular group, but overall more than one generation can use their work to excel their predecessors in every field. She says,

> our work should equip
> the next generation of women
> to outdo us in every field
> this is the legacy we'll leave behind ("progress" 241).

Here, Kaur provides a counter-discourse to stereotypical themes stemming from internalized misogyny that comprise abundant discourse written in patriarchal systems and societies. She highlights the importance of the work women do that are helpful at the micro level of production and macro level of multiple generations of women. Through both her poems, "advice i would have given my mother on her wedding night" and "progress", Kaur personally establishes a harmonious relationship with both past and future generations. In the former poem, she portrays a singular, reductive and monolithic image of a Third World woman that is popular in Western discourse, and uses the same image to display her strength, resilience and inspiration to others within the limitations of patriarchy and tradition. In the latter poem, she solidifies the importance of work done by women. Kaur shows that culture does not limit feminist practices of South Asian women. Much of Western discourse negatively displays the domestication of Third World women and considers them victims. Regardless of their social structures and household roles, work done by South Asian women is equally important and feminist in nature.

3.6 Conclusion

With the help of Mohanty's theoretical perspective, the researcher is able to understand the aim of an intersectional approach towards postcolonial feminism. It lends a liberty of expression and freedom to share their experiences without the need to censor, modify or specify particular themes. Patriarchal systems are connected to current postcolonial influences through similar hierarchies and values in the analysis. For instance, bullying, objectification, violence, harassment and trauma that the poets vocalize through personal and shared experiences of racial bias overlap with gender bias. Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha criticize the systematic bias and

oppression women experience in the form of racism, sexism, classism and misogyny in their poems.

The analysis of their poetry from this particular perspective shows that several forms discriminations and prejudices against women of color are interrelated. If the issue of race is isolated from gender, then many of the struggles and fears experienced by women of color are ignored. The significance of combining racial and feminist issues is to present manifestations of colonial and patriarchal bias that continue to negatively affect the lives of women. For instance, description of a racist incident experienced by the poet is also related to misogyny where she is not just discriminated for being brown, but for being a brown woman.

Overall, this analysis reveals the multiple layers of bias directed towards women of color. The redeeming aspect that has helped South Asian women in diaspora is their feminist practices in their daily lives. Women of color form communities of solidarity which are not limited to shared oppression or sisterhood. They encourage each other to challenge the hurdles of oppression they continue to face from people in power, especially men. Feminist practices mentioned in selected poems range from textual resistance in their poetry to verbal and physical reactions to incidents of misogyny, racism or classism that they faced in real life. These themes provide a great contrast to the Third World Women presented in Western theory and literature written by white women. The poetry of Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha provides a counter-discourse of resistance to patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism and Western feminism. Through these themes, the poets are able to expose the impact of colonialism and patriarchy in its contemporary form which continues to promote the same values but in different form.

CHAPTER 4

EXPLORING THE NECESSITY OF DECOLONIZING RACE AND GENDER IN SELECTED POETRY THROUGH SARA SULERI'S LENS

4.1 Introduction

The critical lens suggested by Sara Suleri focuses on problems created by intersectionality in postcolonial feminism. By intersectionality Suleri means overlapping areas of race, gender and class in the context of postcolonial condition. She considers the postcolonial condition as metaphorical and arbitrary. In her essay *Women Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition* she postulates the question of whether gender or race take precedence in postcolonial feminist discourse. This needs to be taken in to consideration while discussing marginal identities. Limitations and excesses of marginal discourse cause the issue of chronology where it becomes difficult to tell what comes first; gender, race or writing. These considerations translate to repetitive dichotomies, radical subjectivity, generalizations and simplistic binarisms of race and gender. In current feminist discourse, Suleri considers these issues obsolete. They take attention away from the contemporary feminist issues by focusing on the postcolonial condition where "center" is always dominant and so the "postcolonial woman" is attributed with an "uneasy selfhood" in identity formations. Also responding to Western feminist discourse with lived experience establishes generalizations from radical subjectivity (Suleri 756-758; 769).

This chapter evaluates themes in the selected poems by Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha related to simplistic binarisms, uneasy selfhood in identity formations and generalizations that come from radical subjectivity.

4.2 Simplistic Binarism

Postcolonial feminist writings have used several simplistic binarisms like male/female, subject/object, master/servant, colonizer/colonized etc. According to Suleri, this results in generalizations that can be problematic in identity formation (Suleri 757). She also highlights the complications caused by combining

postcolonialism with feminism as oppressive aspects of women's experience is oversimplified. Another binary that emerges is of good and evil where piety is associated with the postcolonial female voice (758).

Generally, the binary of us and them can be found even in marginal discourse. Rupi Kaur expresses this in a short, untitled poem as,

> *why are you so unkind to me*
> my body cries
> *cause you don't look like them*
> i tell her. (Kaur 62)

Here, race and gender issues are difficult to separate. Kaur compares the differences in her body to *them*. Women of color struggle to attain Eurocentric body standards to look like *them*. This establishes a simplistic binary in terms of white and non-white races as well as Western and Eastern women. The poet is unable to escape from colonial struggles of race in order to focus on her bodily autonomy and independent identity formation. Her physical worth is gauged in terms of adhering to white Western standards.

Kaur describes similar experiences in the end-titled poem "basement aesthetician". She mentions binaries of race, class and gender in one poem which continues to shift the themes without focusing on a single issue. She mentions visiting a salon run by women in the basement of a house. These women were of the same age and race as her mother but "looked nothing like my simple mother" because "they had brown skin with / yellow hair meant for white skin / streaks like zebras". When she says that yellow hair is "meant for white skin", Kaur develops the boundaries of *them* where she does not accept the mixing of white and brown physical attributes. She links simplicity to brown women like her mother but compares women who dye their hair with streaks of yellow to "zebras" (80). But further in the poem she still complies with these beauty standards of white women but equates it to punishment she goes through because she does not want to embarrass herself in front of a man for being hairy. She says,

why do i do this
why do i punish my body
for being exactly as it's meant to be
i stop myself halfway through the regret
when i think of him and how
i'm too embarrassed to show him
unless it's clean. ("basement aesthetician" 81)

Initially she questions and almost regrets removing her body hair but then she remembers the shame associated with her body hair that she does not want to experience before "him". Her narrative imposes Eurocentric standards of beauty where being feminine is associated with white women and having hairless bodies. Brown women from colonized countries who have visibly darker body hair are considered more masculine. This becomes a source of embarrassment for Kaur because of the desire to appear beautiful and feminine in front of a man which is not possible until "it's clean" (81). So she simply divides beauty standards to white/brown, hairy/hairless, masculine/feminine and finally male/female.

But these divisions are not limited to physical standards of beauty. The "worth" of women is determined in relation to her male family members. Fatimah Asghar points out how men are given priority over women. In her poem "*Shadi*" (translated from Urdu or Hindi as wedding/marriage) she speaks on behalf of all women by categorizing them in a group based on common oppression. She says, "may our names … come before *you*" aspiring for this in the future since male hierarchy dominates in the present. If women try to prioritize themselves over men, she says they are called, "*butameez*" (translated from Urdu as rude) and "*whore*". She reiterates the object positon of women who are stalked and treated indignantly by men. She hopes for their "silhouettes" to "not be followed", for them to not be "the last fed & the first to wake" (37).

Rupi Kaur continues to thematically integrate similar binaries in her poem "the art of growing" where she talks about going through puberty. She says that she felt beautiful until she turned twelve, when the male gaze began to make her feel uncomfortable in her own body. She was treated differently, objectified by male subjects as they would look at her "newborn hips with salivating lips". The boys at

her school did not want to play with her because they objectified her and wanted to "touch all the new / and unfamiliar parts" of her. Hierarchal powers are divided into the subject who is given power through patriarchy and the object who is controlled by the male desire and gaze. Kaur associated shame and guilt with her own body because she felt as if "it didn't belong to me / it belonged to them". This reinforces ownership of a female object that belongs to the male subject. She internalizes these ideologies through repetition of her own views, views of men around her and finally the views of her mother. When she shares her experiences with her mother, "the men outside are starving", the latter imposes the binary of male desire and female compliance. She advises her daughter to dress in a way that does not attract men or make them express their lust for her. She justifies it by saying "the boys will get hungry if they see fruit" which preserves the male desire. She should also sit appropriately with her "legs closed / like a woman oughta" because that is expected from women as the object of male desire. The consequences of not upholding these boundaries are that "men will get angry and fight" (94). Although Kaur says that she is "not a mannequin in the window / of your favorite shop" to be presented before men who can make her *dress up* as they like, or throw her out when she is *worn*, this solidifies the object position as a woman who is subjected to the male gaze (95-96).

Kaur adds intersectional aspects in her binaristic themes. Along with previously mentioned postcolonial and feminist binaries, in her poem "advice i would've given to my mother on her wedding day" she includes the aspect of class in her 10th point. She advises her mother against blaming herself for not being able to "speak english fluently / or operate a computer or a cell phone" like other mothers who had "flashy phones and designer clothing" because *we* did that to *you*. This shows that the mentioned *we* had the power and control over opportunities and resources of *you* i.e. her mother. It clearly demarcates the haves and have-nots where one group is oppressed by the other who "confined you to the four walls of this home / and worked you to the bone". She says her mother has not been "her own property for decades" showing that ownership, control and power over her mother's life was in *their* hands and not her own (134). This establishes power relations where people, often women, are grouped through the shared oppression of being powerless before the powerful agency of *them* which includes both men in patriarchal settings as well and white people in postcolonial settings.

In such ways, powerful groups have control over class binaries as well. In Fatimah Asghar's poem "Old Country Buffet", she makes a clear distinction between white people who have the resources to spend and waste money and brown immigrants who do not have resources or money. Before Asghar describes an American country buffet, her opening lines state that her family could only visit "on the days we saved enough money" (30). Her family eats to such an extent that they felt the need to loosen "the drawstrings / on our shalwars & gained ten pounds" as they arrived at "the beginning of lunch hour" and left at dinner time (31). They store food in Tupperware "they smuggled in" even when the waitress scolded and threatened to charge them more money but she says, "we weren't leaving / until my greedy ass family had their fill". This depicts a pattern similar to colonizers using their power to control economy and resources of the colonized people while the latter would seek opportunities, similar to what Asghar calls "beg and whine" (30), to get a portion for themselves. The theme of binary powers extends to control over culture in relation to class and race when Asghar shares that she wanted to eat meatloaf at the buffet so she could tell her peers at school, "*I too have had meatloaf / & hate it*" while the latter "scoffed / at our biryani" (31). Through such American-style buffet culture, she shows the significance of power binaries in themes of class, race and colonialism.

Consequently, power relations of patriarchal setups stem from colonial ideals where the classification of haves/have nots, owner/owned and object/subject are rooted in colonial history. Kaur addresses colonizers by saying,

> you split the world
> into pieces and
> called them countries
> declared ownership on
> what never belonged to you
> and left the rest with nothing. ("colonise"137)

She explains how colonizers had the power to geographically and politically divide regions of the world through colonization. Their declaration of ownership allowed them to seize and deprive colonized countries of their own resources. Present-day America is following such colonial patterns of usurpation as explained by Asghar as,

The news said the oil's
drying up. America is starting wars to get it back. My people
are on the list. We can't survive without oil
But, who's got money for both gas & lunch? ("Oil" 53).

So America wages wars on other countries with oil when its own resources deplete. Not only does this deprive the country of its own natural resources but adversely affects its economy, making it difficult for them to fulfill the needs of its people. But the American economy is solidified in return. The capitalist divide is maintained in this way.

Such capitalist hierarchy is imposed globally but also internalized within America as the last stanza of Asghar's "Old Country Buffet" satirically describes,

Here we learned
how to be American & say:
we got the money
we're here to stay. ("Old Country Buffet" 32)

So, America is powerful enough to show similar divisions of class where power belongs to those who have money and only those who have the money can survive. Due to white supremacy, money and wealth are linked to white people as opposed to brown people as class binaries overlap with race. In "what kind of ancestor do you want to be?" Piepzna-Samarasinha shows class division based on race through the contrast between her white mother's behavior and that of her own as a brown woman. Her mother would be rude to sales clerks and "would clutch her purse at me / think I'm low class" because the poet would be generous to working class immigrants including "receptionists, flight attendants, janitors and waitresses" (88-89). She explains her mother's behavior,

Because every kind of white fear told my mama
if you're nice to brown folks
they'll kill you
they'll take the little you have
you should just become middle class
even though you hate those fuckers

even though
they will always hate you. (“what kind of ancestor do you want to be?” 89)

As a white woman, her mother’s world view divides people on the basis of race and class by associating wealth to white people who fear brown people and despise being “middle class”. She also associates criminal behavior with brown people steal from the white people who have wealth and resources. So, her mother tightens her purse and even mocks her brown daughter for being generous considering her “low class”. Her mother thinks if she would loosen her grip on her purse, “she’d be a dead body” (89).

All of these binaries are traced back to divisions created during the colonial rule which still exist throughout the world. Piepzna-Samarasinha describes these binaries in an earnest way in her poem “Bodymap”. She says that maps were, “created by conquerors and the unconquered” thus categorizing the world into these two groups. She further defines these boundaries by establishing the powerful group of “explorers and colonizers” who have the power to make this map. A map does not only establish these binaries, but also “names where bodies begin and end & who will own their treasures”. It indicates the biological power of men along with white supremacy. Consequently, the powerful group of white, male colonizers are conquerors who own the treasures of the unconquered, biologically inferior group. Treasures include “hideouts and secret passageways” to “stashes of food and drugs and guns” clarifying the resources while associating stereotypes of “drugs and guns” with the colonized (“Bodymap” 6).

Asghar reiterates these binaries but associates them with stereotypes about America in “Land Where My Father Died”. She imitates the pattern of the American national anthem but satirizes American land. She calls American people “offspring of colonizers” and “sunless people” of a land that “mispronounces my grief… skins my other land… laughs when my people die & paints targets on my future children’s faces”. Although she intends to criticize American warfare, her poem shows the power America has to continue oppression similar to colonialism. American development and power is apparent as it is the “land of buildings… shackle & braces… that built the first bomb”. It is a land that “makes my other language strange on my tongue”. It is a land that poisoned her mother and killed her father which

reinforces that she continues to be oppressed and controlled by them ("Land Where My Father Died" 55).

4.2 Uneasy Selfhood in Identity Formations

Repetition of various simplistic binaries in current feminist discourse also influences postcolonial identity formations. Suleri attributes an "uneasy selfhood" to the "postcolonial woman" which encapsulates divergent perspectives where race and gender overlap. Uneasy selfhood develops when gender is placed in the center of postcolonialism. In turn, this creates oversimplifications where the female voice bears connotations of being "morally good" and experiences of oppression are celebrated.

After Piepzna-Samarasinha talks about binaries created by colonizers and conquerors through a map, she also says that maps can be rewritten. She establishes an identity through the lens of colonial experience but suddenly shifts her focus to her identity as a woman. Her uneasiness is reflected when she says, "these maps can be rewritten. / rewrite my body" ("Bodymap" 6). Even though she attributes power to colonizers and conquerors who make these maps, she does not specify who has the power to rewrite the map and also rewrite her body. So, as a postcolonial woman, her identity is subject to change without specifying if the map of her body is still determined by other powers or if she has the ability to form her own identity. A few lines ahead she asks to, "rewrite my body with me" referring to an ambiguous authority but also showing her agitation in developing her own identity. Ultimately, she ends the poem by asking the other to "change me" portraying the need or desire to "make each other's bodies new" (7).

She also describes this uneasy selfhood in "Wrong is not your name" where she says that her grandmother's advised her to "*keep a white name"* just for the sake of a passport (68). But Piepzna-Samarasinha says that she wants her great-grandmother's name, "who means hot pepper" and she also wants to associate with the postcolonial struggle of her great-grandmother as a woman, "who walked out of Galicia with 13 children" during the German colonization (69). She mentions her "other great-grandmother",

> whose name is a footnote in a
> lankan history book's cross-referenced index you find researching
> yr senior thesis on mixed-race women in sri lanka. ("Wrong is not your name" 69)

So, she searches for features related to her identity through research and historical discourse instead of creating it through her own experiences. She wants to identify with multiple characteristics from her great-grandmothers experiences but her grandmother advises against it as she suggests to "*keep as many passports as possible*" because she might have to "bullshit" someone "in an immigration office" or run from home (68). There is a sense of displacement that forms a conflict between generational identities especially because of the variation in experiences. Overall, generational trauma adds confusions and apprehensions in her identity formations.

There are several other factors in addition to abovementioned postcolonial and feminist binaries, and generational identity crises. At an individual level, Piepzna-Samarasinha expresses how she struggles with her identity,

> one day you are a 22-year-old with dreadlocked half-desi hair
> you decided to lock when you did double dip mescaline on new
> year's ever after staring at pictures of sadhus in south india. ("Wrong is not your name" 68)

So, she gradually adds characteristics that she realizes should be a part of her identity. She calls herself, "half-desi" and proceeds to put her hair in dreadlocks because she looked a picture of a sadhu in south india, under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug mescaline. These identity formations are not thoroughly deliberated through the development of selfhood, rather a product of sudden realizations and aspects of her culture and history that she can relate to. She changes her hair after seeing a sadhu because she says she had "no idea what to do with all / that curly curly hair" before commercialization of products that cater to curly hair, common in South Asia and Africa (68).

Piepzna-Samarasinha presents contradictions in development of her identity by deciding to "change her name from Albrecht" to "no more albrecht". She has learned more about who she should be through theoretical discourse "of franz fanon marlon riggs and chrystos". She declares that she is "a sri lankan / Christian daughter

of the dutch east india company" who wants "no more Albrecht". But her grandmother tells her to "*keep a white name / for the passport keep as many passports as possible*" because she might have to suddenly get on a boat and "bullshit (someone) in an immigration office" (68).

Oftentimes, confusion arises in pursuit of adapting a multicultural identity originating from multiple locations that can be traced back to ancestral history. It becomes difficult to address every aspect of the past while anchoring it in the present postcolonial. It is further complicated when it is difficult to distinguish boundaries of imperialism i.e. what aspects of identity are pre-colonial and which ones have been influenced by colonialism. Fatimah Asghar elaborates such dilemmas in her poem as,

> you're a Kashmiri until they burn your home. take your orchards. stake a different flag. until no one remembers the road that brings you back. you're indian until they draw a border through Punjab ("Partition" 9).

Constructing coherent multicultural identity is challenging because the presence of a Western center cannot be separated. Here Asghar generalizes the way in which territorial affiliations create conflict in identity formation because they are prominently influenced by Western colonization. Nationalism is brought in to question and becomes a source of discomfort when these identities are used for racial bias and cultural discrimination. In a way, Western imperialism still influences people of color. People of color are shameful of cultural associations because "british captains spit *paki*" and yet "sip your chai, and add so much foam you can't taste home" (9). It is socially acceptable for white people to use elements of South Asian lifestyle through culture appropriation and whitewashing but they are biased against the same culture identity of the natives. The fear of racism and national discrimination forces people of color to stop using their native languages "until your mouth fills with english". Even some national identities receive more social acceptance than others therefore many people switch territorial affiliations resulting in vague ambiguity. For instance, when Asghar says,

> you're pakistani until your classmates ask what that is. then you're indian again. or some *kind of Spanish.* you speak a language until you don't. ("Partition" 9)

Such uneasiness in selfhood generates an identity crisis when Asghar says that she is unable to recognize her native language when spoken by her auntie. She says that her father spoke four languages and her "grandfather wrote Persian poetry on glasses" but she is "illiterate in the tongues" of her father. She follows this by doubt in the authenticity of her family's history. She is not sure if she can remember correctly or if she "made it up" or "someone lied" (9). Her struggle becomes more complicated when the postcolonial metaphorical identity is crossed with her identity as a woman. She claims to be a daughter only until they buried her mother and did not invite her to her father's funeral. She forms her identity through familial affiliations and says that being a daughter is no longer a part of her identity when she is separated from her family or when her family members die. This familial identity conflicts with the identity she wanted to form through language spoken by her father and grandfather because she cannot sustain this identity after their demise. She also addresses the issue of morality, especially in religious terms, is often connoted with the voice of women of color. She shows how difficult it is to create a singular identity when there are multiple complications that are interrelated. She says,

> you're a virgin until you get too drunk. you're a muslim until you're not a virgin. you're a pakistani until they start throwing acid. you're a muslim until it's too dangerous. you're safe until you're alone. you're american until the towers fall. until there's a border on your back ("Partition" 9).

In the poem above, she shows her struggle with various elements found in South Asian culture but in her poem "Oil" she states that her Auntie A told her that "my people might / be Afghani". So she draws a ship on a map and writes "*Afghani* under its hull" as she counts "all the oceans, blood & not-blood, / all the people I could be, / the whole map, my mirror" (49). While she is searching for a singular identity to relate to, she is also not confining herself to it opening up the possibility to be anyone. A conflict also surfaces when she talks about the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers to which she reacted strongly by saying, "I crossed the ship / out on the map… All the people I could be are dangerous" (51). There is a sense of fear in relating to being Afghani due to the connotations of terrorism and racial bias she could experience in America. She is quick in dissociating herself from her nationality which she also mentions in her poem "The Last Summer of Innocence". She learned that she was "dangerous" from the TV so she "tried to learn Spanish" and pretend that

she was “the other kind of other” (58). The conflict of her identity is depicted in “Oil” when her “head / wages war on itself” and her doctor says she has “thin skin”. She also stops letting her Auntie A oil her hair. She also shows the impact of dehumanization where she feels like she has no blood, “just my body & all its oil” which metaphorically relates to America’s search for oil in countries like Afghanistan (53).

Asghar’s agitation becomes a part of her physical appearance as well because she was bullied in school when kids wrote “*anthrax* on the locker” where she kept her body mist and a girl named Alexandra said that she “smelled musty” (52). Her walk to school makes “the oil pool” her forehead and “a lake spill” under her armpits (53). She tries to cover it up with body mist and takes multiple showers as if she wants to wash off her identity. In another poem “To Prevent Hypothermia” she criticizes her physical appearance because, “each inch” had “matted-down / disobedient, hair plastered / to my brown legs” (44). She expresses her desire to be like white girls she, “had stolen glances at” and wished she “could look like” because of their “hairless legs” and “skin ripe as peaches” (45).

Rupi Kaur also articulates her experience with uneasiness in her body especially as a female because of the harassment. she also talks about the shame associated with visibly darker body hair of South Asian women. In the poem “basement aesthetician”, many young girls including Kaur would visit a basement salon run by women of her neighborhood frequently because her “girlhood was too much hair”, her “thin limbs coated in velvet” and her eyebrows were like “caterpillars” (80). But this body discomfort has deeper origins as Kaur states in her poem “the art of growing”. She vocalizes her hatred for her body because she was embarrassed when men sexualized her body and uttered the word “*boobs*”, when she was just twelve years old (94). She says, “there is nothing worth seeing here but guilt and shame” because she continues to relive the trauma of harassment and rape. She recounts the memory of a man who used “his hooked fingers” to charge at her and “feast on” her “half moons” (95). That traumatic event becomes a part of her identity with which she declares “*i hate this body* / i must have done something terrible to deserve it” (95).

4.3 Radical Subjectivity and Generalizations

Suleri considers lived experience an inadequate response to Western discourse and theory. She calls it "radical subjectivity" where specific personal experiences are used to make greater generalizations about all postcolonial and feminist experiences. Another issue with radical subjectivity is that it conflicts with reality of the world because it romanticizes oppression. There is a chance of creating arbitrary crossovers of race and gender issues while articulating subjective experiences. Although "talking back" through these experiences appears to be empowering, it also raises the question of authenticity, repeats binaries of oppressive discourse and addresses gender and racial issues in strictly biological terms. Therefore, autobiographical accounts cannot be equated to objective evidence because it is limited to the experience of the native informant who is already dealing with the problem of "uneasy selfhood".

In Fatimah Asghar's poem "*Shadi*", she speaks on behalf of all women of color based on historical oppression. She generalizes experiences of women in patriarchal and colonial settings. She includes herself in the narrative of oppressed women by using "we" to address the issue of women's worth determined by men. This results in repetition of patriarchal binaries of power where men oppress women. They objectify women by attributing material value of "two goats & maybe a rose ring or a bracelet". Then this generalized experience reverts to racial biologism where women faced harsh treatment only because of their gender and body. Even though Asghar implies the existence of current feminist issues where women are discriminated on the basis of their sex but the focus shifts from racial to patriarchal oppression by presenting issues from postcolonial history and then generalizing it to experiences of all racial women where she hopes one day "may we be more than a body" ("*Shadi*"37).

Similarly, Rupi Kaur gives an account of her experiences by using the same premise as Asghar about female body to sustain the powerful position of men in society. In an untitled poem, she shares the story of when her body was objectified and violated by men. When she shares this story with her mother, the latter tells her to change the way she dresses and "sit with (her) legs closed / like woman oughta / or men will get angry and fight" (Kaur 95). The solution to avoid harassment and abuse from the hands of men is to ensure the male ego is satisfied and women comply with

their desires if they “just learn to act like a lady”. She has to “convince half of the world’s population” that her “body is not their bed” which places the burden of the physical violation on the woman instead of holding men accountable for their actions. Female breasts are compared to “fruit” that will make men hungry is they see them hanging, as if the existence of women gives authority to men over women as objects of their desire. Kaur says that she would prefer learning science and math instead of learning “the consequences of womanhood” where the acceptance of her own anatomy “will invite thoughts of lust in their heads”. She limits the abilities of women due to their body, as if they are busy keeping their “thighs pressed together / like they’re hiding a secret” which hinders their physical and mental performance. Through all of her own experiences, she sums up the experience of all woman but refuses to “subject (herself) to their ideology” where she calls all objectification, abuse, violations and harassment “rape culture”,

> cause slut shaming is rape culture
> virgin praising is rape culture
> i am not a mannequin in the window
> of your favorite shop
> you can’t dress me up or
> throw me out when i am worn (“the art of growing” 95-96).

Such metaphors attempt to challenge “rape culture” where the female sexuality and bodily autonomy determine their worth in patriarchal society but provides no tools for emancipation as women are still defined through their object position and men are still given the powers as subjects to control the bodies of women. Kaur’s personal experience does nothing to change the narrative that has already been set by Western discourse about third world “feminism”.

Kaur uses similar themes in “advice i would’ve given to my mother on her wedding day”. She writes the poem in the form of numbered bullet points addressed to her mother advising her on various aspects of her mother’s life. In the second point, she normalizes toxic masculinity of her father. She advises her mother to go with her father regardless of how her grandfather, “beat the language of love” out of her father (133). She should still “go with him” when he has sex with her, even though he will “never know how to say” that he loves his wife. Instead she let his “actions… prove

he loves you". Her mother should not get an abortion even though "his family" will try to convince her to do so when they find out she is expecting a baby girl (133). She suggests her mother seek comfort in her loneliness by developing with other "lovely women in the apartment complex" because they will "need each other to stay alive" when their husbands go to factories to work (133). Apart from this, she tells her mother that her husband and children will "emotionally and mentally starve" her even though it is wrong. Kaur gives others the right to have control over her mother's life choices and her bodily autonomy. They still have the power to grant permission. Throughout the poem, Kaur romanticizes the woman her mother could have been, but she is not that woman. At the end of the poem, Kaur appreciates her mother for the qualities she has developed through patriarchal hierarchies. She maintains that her mother should be fine with her father's lack of expressing his love, his absence, her loneliness, her sacrifices and others control over her body. Although she wanted to let her mother know that she had the option to say "no" in the first point of the poem, the rest of the poem suggests otherwise. Kaur sentimentalizes her mother's sacrifices and endurance as the "first woman in (her) lineage / to raise a family on a strange land by (herself)" while adhering to patriarchal values as if she were "magician //… hero of heroes / the god of gods" (134-135).

Kaur continues to romanticize the struggle of her immigrant parents by drawing comparisons to colonial standards in her poem "Broken English". She says that her father pulled her family "out of poverty" and her mother raised children "without being able to construct a perfect sentence in English" or knowing "what a vowel was", as if the standard of financial wellbeing and raising a family is linked to one's competence in speaking English (149). She calls her parents a "discombobulated couple" who immigrated "*into the dream of a country*" that appeared to be swallowing them whole. They put all of their money on the line but ended up with rejection as their university degrees "meant nothing". They had no family or friends and her father could see the loneliness in her mother's eyes but he wanted to "give her a home in a country that looks at her / with the word *visitor* wrapped around its tongue" (149). Her mother is a "warrior" for leaving her village and country to be his wife to make sure "the children of immigrants / wouldn't hate them for being children of immigrants" (150). She romanticizes "the masterpiece"

that is her parents financial and racial struggle as immigrants. It is “the most artistic thing… poetry to these ears” when,

> they worked too hard
> you can tell by their hands
> their eyes are begging for sleep
> but our mouths where begging to be fed (“Broken English” 150).

She considers the English language insufficient to describe the beauty of their sacrifices and struggles but proceeds to write thirteen more lines about the inadequacy of expression in the English language. Then Kaur describes the “broken english” that “spills out” of her mother’s mouth by fixating on her ability to speak English. Even when compares her mother’s accent to honey, it lends a tone of alienation and exoticness that has been used by Western writers to describe colonized people. She describes its “richness” as something valuable that should be put up on the walls of a museum as “it’s the only thing she has left of home”. Her reference to placing it in a museum is a reference to colonizers’ practices of looting invaluable cultural artifacts from their colonies to display in western museums. Kaur romanticizes her life by calling it “brilliant and tragic” even though her mother struggled through poverty, moved to a different country, had no family or friends while “an entire nation laughed” because of the way she spoke English. She ends the poem by calling it all art (150).

Fatimah Asghar similarly romanticizes oppression in her poem “How We Left: Film Retreat”. She remarks, “Everyone wants Kashmir but no one wants Kashmiris”. This shows a desire for Kashmiris to be owned by an external force similar to a colonizer instead of being independent. She romanticizes surviving war in disputed territories like Kashmir as if she is a “miracle” or a “seed that survived the slaughter and slaughters / to come” suggesting continuation of massacre in the future. This contradicts with the next line where she says that she “believes in freedom” but just doesn’t “know where it is”. She does not call Kashmir her home but instead says that she believes in home but just doesn’t “know where to look (17).

She attempts to use an inclusive and multicultural narrative in her poem “If They Come for Us” where she groups all people of color in one category of “my people” who she finds “on the street & shadow / through any wild all wild”. She

presents various examples of South Asian people including an old woman in a sari with a bindi, a “khala” who wears her kurta with crocs, a Sikh uncle who apologizes to a Muslim at the airport as he pats him down and the Muslim man leaves his car at the call of the azan to “drop to his knees” but also gets drunk on whiskey at maghrib. She says that she cannot be lost when she sees “my people” who she calls her “compass… brown & gold & blood” (99). In “How We Left: Film Retreat” she asks for some “other” to “own” Kashmir that she does not call her own country or home but in “If They Come For Us” she says that she “claim(s) them all” and,

> my country is made
> in my people’s image
> if they come for you they
> come for me too in the dead (“If They Come For Us” 100).

So when she leaves Kashmir, she is a “survivor” and a “miracle” who cannot find home, but South Asian immigrants in America make her “image” and her country. She is willing to sacrifice her life if “they” attack her people. In this way, her lived experience gives conflicting accounts of her personal experiences and identity, making the authenticity of her discourse questionable (Asghar 100).

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion to this analysis, the researcher is able to evaluate another side of the postcolonial feminist picture. It highlights the issues with intersectional approaches to feminism. Combining issues of race, class and gender result in repetition of the same themes, struggles and ideas. It leads to redundancy of notions that have already been discussed in Western theory. It shows the problem with autobiographical generalizations. When multiple external and internal factors are merged in the same poem, the poets cannot provide sufficient response to issues in a way that the West has not already addressed. The predicament of prioritizing the urgency of issues is foregrounded, since race and gender both undeniably play an essential role in forming identities of women of color. Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha mix various themes with the implication that all issues of inequality related to race and gender are connected through oppression. Other discriminations linked to race and gender, like classism, included in their work reinforce both racial

and gender oppression. Their work continues to focus on oppressive aspects which diminish empowering aspects of feminism or decolonization. Instead, their poems sustain patriarchal and colonial values. Their themes are confined to simple and clear divisions of haves and have-nots. The identity formation of the writers and their representation of people of color is affected. The poets are clearly uneasy in their own self beyond the presets of binaries. If they speak on behalf of other people of color or women, they associate the same identity crisis to marginalized communities through stereotypical discourse. Due to the evident subjectivity of their experiences, the authenticity of their experiences as means of decolonization related to race and gender becomes questionable.

CHAPTER 5

DECOLONIZATION OF RACE AND GENDER: CHANDRA MOHANTY AND SARA SULERI'S CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO POETRY OF KAUR, ASGHAR AND PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA

This chapter aims to present two contrasting critical approaches to postcolonialism and feminism noted by the researcher after analysis of selected poetry. The analysis reveals the benefits and drawbacks of addressing multiple issues entwined with race and gender. On one hand, Chandra Mohanty favors intersectionality in addressing racial and gender bias through personal experiences. She believes this approach helps Third World women decolonize Western discourse, literature and feminism. On the other hand, Sara Suleri disfavors overlapping issues of postcolonialism and feminism because it diverts the focus from important feminist issues by focusing on the same historical patterns of colonialism which have been explained and evaluated through abundant academic research and literature. Both sides of the argument in favor and against decolonization of race and gender can be contrasted through the analysis of selected poetry by Kaur, Asghar and Piepzna-Samarasinha.

All three poets give multiple accounts of their experiences and opinions related to race and gender in their poetry. Their poetry portrays their struggles in the development of a singular identity, feeling comfortable in their skin, enjoying their culture and conveying authentic experiences of brown women in North America. Racial discrimination plays a significant role in their writing. Race is not isolated when discussing the discrimination against brown women from Mohanty's perspective. It indicates other prejudices associated with racism including misogyny, sexuality and classism as contributing factors to the struggle of brown immigrant woman. For instance, in Fatimah Asghar's "Partition", she talks about all the national identities that are merged, reduced and generalized to her skin color. She talks about being associated with Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani nationalities. This allows her to switch between different languages according to the identity she wants to be

associated with. But according to Suleri, this is reflective of uneasiness in her identity as a brown woman. Especially in diaspora, people of color are discriminated through general racial assumptions. But as Asghar mentions in her poem, this discrimination is not exclusively related to her race but it encompasses her religion, familial relations, languages she can speak, and ultimately, her gender plays a crucial role in determining shaping her personality. She addresses several issues in a series displaying multiple discriminations she faces along with her own identity crises and her struggles as a woman of color. She shifts from national identity, to linguistic identity and ends with unrelated but important feminist problems including acid throwing and virgin praising. On one hand, it shows the ways in which South Asian women are influenced by multiple factors as women of color where being a brown woman means struggling against oppression on multiple levels. Even though Mohanty claims her idea of feminism is not focused on oppression of women, Suleri mentions the difficulty in avoiding the theme of oppression when feminism is overlapped with postcolonial history. In the analysis of poems including Piepzna-Samarasinha's *wrong is not yours*, Rupi Kaur's "advice i would've given my mother on her wedding day" and Fatimah Asghar's "*Shadi*", regardless of the poets' intention to criticize patriarchy and racism they reiterate the perpetuation of oppression against women. Suleri says that such themes result in repetition of the same binaristic relations established by colonialism and maintained through patriarchy where women become the objects of racial discrimination, misogyny and harassment by white people and all men.

By separating issue of race from gender, Suleri considers it easier for writers to address contemporary feminist issues. Tracing feminism back to the postcolonial condition will constantly overwhelm the discourse with issues of identity and generalized oppression repeated through the same themes. For instance, Rupi Kaur expresses her emotions when she is objectified by the male gaze her untitled poem where says that she will not subject herself to "rape culture" of being slut shamed, praised for being a virgin or treated her like a mannequin in the window of a shop used by men to satisfy their desires (Kaur 95-96). She criticizes the patriarchal patterns of power that enable harassment of women. She is able to speak about her experience as a brown woman without constantly reminding the reader of all the other issues concurrent with the misogyny and harassment. It focuses the attention on a

singular theme foregrounding the importance and severity of the problem but is also leads to reassertion of binaries. Even though Kaur addresses important feminist issues, she also reinforces patriarchal division of men and women. She places women in the object position that can be controlled by their subjects i.e. men. These binaries impose the same ideologies that Western theories already use to talk about Third World women. While the poets highlight valid issues of brown women in poems like "Land Where My Father Died" by Asghar, "Bodymap" by Piepzna-Samarasinha or "Home" by Kaur, they also discuss these issues through the same narrative established by Western discourse giving power to white people and men.

One clear issue with their narration is their identity crises that continues to resurface in many of the poems including "basement aesthetician" by Kaur and "Oil" and "To Prevent Hypothermia" by Asghar, the writers vocalize their discomfort in being brown women with body hair due to the contrast with beauty standards of white women. White people continue to exercise their power over people of color, especially women. Addressing white supremacy and standard established by white women from Mohanty's perspective allows South Asian women to reclaim their voice and empower themselves through discourse of resistance. Suleri believes this continues to assert the dominance of Western theory at the center of marginalized discourse. Writers present their identity crises and lived experiences by comparing themselves to white people who are placed at the center. For instance, in her poem "everytime I see you I think what the hell was I thinking?", Piepzna-Samarasinha attempts to empower herself by claiming her identity as a, "mean / broken-hipped / brown femme / who survived" but immediately placing "white bois with eager butts / and nonprofit movement jobs" at the center (Piepzna-Samarasinha 13). Also in "Oil", Asghar depicts the difficulty of forming a singular identity when her aunt tells her that she might be Afghani but she considers the whole map her mirror as she could be anyone she wants to be, "blood & not-blood" (Asghar 49). But when witnesses the racism and bullying on the basis of her race, she dissociates from any national or ethnic association.

Consequently, decolonization becomes a challenge for immigrants who are already struggling to understand their own identity and idea of home. Their experiences contain a variety of issues that Mohanty considers important to address in order to dismantle the lingering effects of colonialism. Suleri thinks the postcolonial

condition is arbitrary and metaphorical, as opposed to the historical event of colonialism. In this perspective, marginalized communities including South Asians have not fully recovered from the colonial hangover and have not reached the stage after colonialism. The poets still relate their experiences of racism, misogyny and classism to colonial values. For example, in context of Rupi Kaur's "Broken English", Mohanty's point of view appreciates the descriptions of the mother's struggle because she addresses immigrant struggles but on the other hand Suleri criticizes the romanticized depiction of the mother's struggles and her being viewed through colonial standards. Where Kaur says an "entire nation" ridicules her mother's accent, she is still approaching it in binary terms, with one side subservient and the other as the aggressor. Similar depictions are found in Kaur's "advice i would've given my mother on her wedding day", where regardless of racial discrimination and patriarchal oppression throughout her mother's life, no practical applicable solutions to racism and misogyny are presented. Feminism does not triumph, and decolonization does not occur. Both merely end up being romanticized in the poem.

Overall, both theories provide solid approaches to race and gender issues. Mohanty's perspective provides insight to contributing elements in bias and oppression of women. These elements are connected to each other as seen in the poems. While expressing their problems, concerns and experiences, the poems also contain themes that are heavily influenced by the literature and theories previously produced by Western white writers to depict South Asians. Their binaries and influences on immigrant identities confirm Suleri's theory that it decolonization is not practical because postcolonial condition and subjective experiences contradict with contemporary and real life feminist issues.

Conclusion

The main contributing factors that have been discussed throughout this study are race and gender. One of the critical contextual foundations for evaluating these factors in the selected poetry is postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is considered significant in South Asia studies. A lot of research has been conducted on factors that have originated from colonialism and impacted the behavior of people in terms of their treatment of South Asian women.

Race and gender issues become integral to the themes in selected poetry because the poets share their experiences of discrimination as South Asian women and immigrants. Mohanty's approach helped the researcher understand the advantages of intersectionality where imperialism and colonial hierarches are still maintained in Western countries as women of color deal with bullying, bias and inequalities interlinked with racism and misogyny. Poetry by Rupi Kaur, Fatimah Asghar and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha show the deeply rooted colonial influences that persistent regardless of the apparent end of colonial rule. The selected poetry presents different and new forms of colonialism that have evolved in the present era. For instance, Fatimah Asghar reveals several ways in which America follows colonial patterns of political and social control to maintain its position of power, globally. In her poems "Old Country Buffet" and "Oil", she describes American culture based on capitalism where Americans have a large reserve of resources for white but they deprive immigrants of equal opportunities enjoy those resources by discriminating against them for their culture, race and class. But the question still exists, whether decolonization is practically possible through feminist discourse or not. After analysis of the poems from both perspectives, the researcher considers Suleri's argument that it is not possible without creating more problems than solutions. Repetitions of the same ideals and discriminations does not result in production of effective discourse that does justice to the experiences of marginalized communities.

There is still a long way to go before colonized people will no longer shape their identities under colonial influences. Colonialism and imperialism have had long-lasting traumatic impacts on so many countries all over the world. Centuries of colonial impositions will take much more time, theories, discourse and literature in order to live a life beyond man-made boundaries of race and gender.

Recommendations

There are various possibilities for further research related to this current study. Firstly, it is possible to research the diaspora of a specific country or region, as the current research is generally dealing with North America. So, the place of immigration can be specified to America or Canada. Furthermore, diaspora in European or South American countries can also be taken in to consideration. Secondly, the researcher recommends narrowing down the country of origin of the poets from South Asia as the current study has taken three poets from three different South Asian countries. Finally, thematic analysis can be broadened or replaced by textual analysis in future studies. For instance, the researcher limits her study to themes specified by the conceptual framework but other researchers may explore other themes found in the poetry of these poets.

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Appendix A

Poems taken from *Bodymap* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha

1. bodymap

for christmas, you write me your body.
for a love token, you offer me your body's map.
I stroke gold glitter finger tips and satin beige skin
on the crackle of paper unfolding.

here, levitation.
here, a cock you created
out of your best imaginations
that grows hard at a shot of cleavage
like straight up amber whiskey.

in return, I gift you mine:
austere wordless infant
g spot shooting tears
ass stomp and razor blade switch
the pleasures and the dangers

if a map is created by conquerers and the unconquered
if the empire can shrink africa but africa remains how big she is
these maps can be rewritten.
rewrite my body.

each day I tip tincture to lips,
drip three drips, whisper
change me

if a map is an artifact made by explorers and colonizers
if a map names where bodies begin and end & who will own their treasures
if a map could be made to show the hideouts and secret passageways

the stashes of food and drugs and guns
if we both have written maps to the stars
where our spirit flies out
and then written our return:
rewrite my body with me
you have wings tattooed on your breastbone
where I have the word home in cherry brown
I can already feel where we will make each other's bodies new
what story will we unfurl this time
change me (6-7).

2. **everytime I see you I think**
   what the hell was I thinking?

I wasn't thinking.
I was heart
broken. I was chest
cracked like axe. I was thinking
what the hell &
what's the worst thing
that could happen
the most dangerous questions
for any mean
broken-hipped
brown femme
who survived
whose pussy lips lift hopeful
twitch like touch me not petals

yearn for something worthy
of her open

white bois with eager butts
and nonprofit movement jobs you wanted
are just like whole foods take out:
when you are too tired
to cook your own food
you can pay too much
for a tasteless version of your culture
that promises it won't kill you.
afterwards, a greasy crunched compostable box
and debit charge so much more expensive
than you budgeted for.

a smear of your petals on the windshield
won't be the fought-for-flavour
blooming on your tongue
your particular vulnerable longed for
homefood (13-14)

3. wrong is not yours

for all of us with beautiful long names from the homelands,
especially for those of us who got them in adulthood

one day your are a 22-year-old with dreadlocked half-desi hair
you decided to lock when you did double dip mescaline on new
year's ever after staring at pictures of sadhus in south india.
years before Carol's Daughter or Palmer coconut hair milk, or
Kinky Curl in Target and you have no idea what do with all
that curly curly hair

who decides you wants to change her name from albreacht no more albrecht
you want your great-grandmothers you are a 22-year-old on
a straight diet of franz fanon marlon riggs and chrystos you are a sri lankan
Christian daughter of the dutch east india company you want no more Albrecht
no more rape in your pelvis no more *where'd you get that name* no more *are you*

adopted
no more

even through yr grandmas whisper *keep a white name*
for the passport *keep as many passports as possible* you
never know what boat you're doing to have to get on who
you'll have to bullshit in an immigration office
you never know where we'll have to run to make home in
sip your tea cook your rice wait for death
looking at an ocean that almost looks like yours

but you want your great-grandmother's name who means hot
pepper who walked out of the Galicia with 13 children
your other great-grandmother whose name is a footnote in a
lankan history book's cross-referenced index you find researching
yr senior thesis on mixed-race women in sri lanka teachers
union organizers and sluts everyone of us
and you get something infinitely googleable and infinitely
unpronounceable except for ukranians and lankans and dravidians

and even when dennis kucinich runs for president
and puts an mp3 file on while website saying how to say his name
and you think it might be a good idea too
your name is not wrong
wrong is not your name
it is your own
your own

your own
your own
your own (68-69).

4. what kind of ancestor do you want to be?

my mom was rude to sales clerks
was too afraid to chat easy
power locked all the doors
was afraid she'd get jumped

I grew up
to be that lady who tips 30%
sits on her stoop with her coffee
in booty shorts and a leopard print coat and wild-assed bed hair
no bra
saying hi and yelling at all the kids on the block

I grew up to be the lady
who says please and thank you
yes ma'am and yes sir
cracks a joke
and says, *you look really nice today*
here's a dollar
how you doing?

who throws clothing swaps and dinners
and has a bunch of chickens in the freezer at all times
extra rice and beans and pain meds and a heating pad
and blankets and couches
for anyone who needs them

my mama would clutch her purse at me
think I'm low class
but being nice to receptionists, flight attendants, janitors and waitresses
gives you all kinds of magic
noticing folks means they notice you back
give you something on the house
hook you up
and
it just makes you feel good

my mama will probably die
cause she doesn't have a hook up

Because every kind of white fear told my mama
if you're nice to brown folks
they'll kill you
they'll take the little you have

you should just become middle class
even though you hate those fuckers
even though
they will always hate you
It told her if she relaxed her grip on her purse
she'd be a dead body
not that she could get a smile if she gave one
commiseration
a free drink
not
that it would feel good
but me I'm her daughter
and grew up to be that aunty
grey and pink hair and tight red skirt
all loud-assed
tipping good and telling you you look really nice today
sipping my coffee in green terry booty shorts and a leopard print coat
on my stoop
and me
I do it
for both of us (88-90).

5. **everyone thinks you're so lazy. don't let them**

this is your work:

slam the alarm over and over again.
then grab your Hitachi.
this will melt the shards of ice hardened in joints.
whole grains in Tupperware, coffee and drugs await you.
do your yoga: your ancestors knew how to melt rock in hard
times,
then get back home under the covers.

this is your commute:
to bless the daily act of breathing
as work as necessary as nine-to-five.

this is your work:
like other invalids able to make art under the sheets
to be blessed just for breathing

this labour not paid not union:
this is your work.
own it.
make sure you get paid what you are worth.
make sure you pay yourself first
make sure you say *work*
breathe *work*:
exhale and inhale:
our survival is
the opposite of lazy (24).

6. **this is what I know about crazy**

Crazy fam, before anything else, I want to say, I love you. I love us. I am loyal to us with the first sunrise and the last sunset. I will stand and sit for us. Give me the worst, the most secret shit crusted moment, and it will not be too much for me. I will touch it gently, with my best honour. Wrong is not out name, was never our name, not in our worst moments hiding in the toilet trying to convince ourselves not to flush ourselves down it.

the thing I wanted to say about crazy is:

1. there is nothing wrong with you
2. it still sucks sometimes
3. you gotta figure out a way to love yourself anyway
4. it's a daily practice. we're all really good at that
5. most folks won't want you to talk about it why?
5.5 cause it freaks them out or their shit out or reminds them of them or they can't understand how you're saying it out loud. wtf is wrong with you are you crazy?
6. cause if you grew up in a family like mine or even if you didn't. talking about it meant you might be taken away somewhere. . . forever
7. crazy lockups have to do with ableism and the prison industrial complex and poverty. if we're a freak we're stared at and lockedaway. we're some of the threat, all of the time
8. you can still grow between the cracks. punch out space in your chest for a liberated zone. be in bed as much as you fucking want. take the pills don't take the pills.

you're going to find the people you can sketch the secret inside of the world with. if you can't find them you can sketch the secret inside of your world inside yourself. breathe in the place where all the words fall away into lemon yellow rose fractals and it's fucking amazing.

9. there's treasure there and there's also rocks

10. I don't believe it's just a symptom or biochemistry but if you

do, it’s ok. I will stand with my people for whatever keeps us alive

11. your crazy is beloved genius art when you’re not standing
on the tracks trying not to jump, and when you are. . . that’s
different.

12, it gets better it doesn’t get better it just changes it gets better
it doesn’t get better it just changes

1. my people have always been crazy

but our crazy isn’t that beloved crazy of fancy white dead men
our crazy is just crazy
dirty
innocent
writhing

when we love ourselves it’s dirty
underground
and gorgeous

we’re feared and hated and loved
by cops, doctors
and our families
people on the street when we don’t pass
and queerfamily
who is scared
sometimes we fear and hate and love ourselves
all at the same time

2. when I lose language and words it's so innocent. wrong is never the name when I don't see the word tree, i see the tree, I see the sky. I see everything as it is. I see colour and scent and music, I see everything before words. this is my first language. nothing is wrong with it. it doesn't allow me to get on the bus. I am translating every single word I am saying to you from that first language. this is not a metaphor. you don't believe me. I'm so articulate. I got a really high score on my verbal SATs. I had to, but my first language is the palace of colours and scent and being. and I'm not lying to you, and the worst thing you could do when i'm in it, when finding every fucking word is like climbing a fucking mountain, is to laugh.

3. the ones for whom nothing is too much are precious. treasure them your best treasure.

4. sometimes you will forget that not everyone knows the inside of crazyworld. you'll wake up with a start when you realize there are those whose brains never melted, who have never kissed the inside lip of the mouth of the gun of trauma. you will start awake at their stares. how can they not know this world? isn't it written on the inside lip of everything?

5. there are many people who know the inside of crazyworld, but they are hiding more than even we are. we are all hiding to a certain degree to survive this world. i don't want to be locked up or stared at and I want to have friends and a job, so I have practiced how to smile and ask for an English breakfast tea just

right. I do a really good job of it. That's why you want me to come to your college to do some gay performance art, isn't it?

6. my mom taught me all about holding it together and then having private time to fall the fuck apart. even when you're working class and that time is fiveminutes locked in your car. my mom taught me about box gallo white wine, her recliner and yr and lifetime television for women. basically a single mom with a husband who didn't fuck her, two jobs, a mom who couldn't drive anymore who was taking a long time to die in the social security housing complex for seniors in webster mas. my mom had no pleasure. and a lot of crazy. and a lot of splits in her brain, and she held it the fuck together until it was time to go home to the house she was paying the mortgage on, all by herself. and she did it without therapy or drugs or friends.

I was the little girl who read anne landers, and used to say to her, mommy, can we go to family therapy some day? and she would hold her hand back like she was going to slap me in the face, but she wouldn't, because she was better than her mother and say: what the fuck is wrong with you what kind of people do you think we are do you want to get taken away somewhere?

7. internalized ableism is the worst and half of us don't even know that word. but it's that voice that tells you you are making it all up, you need to get the fuck out of bed, what the fuck is wrong with you, why is it so hard there's nothing wrong with you, you're a hypochondriac, this is fucking nothing, that's not what pain feels like. buck up buck up buck up.

you can’t just buck up.
sometimes we rise anyway.
so often we rise anyway.
so often we go to work anyway.

there is no nest. sometimes.

gotta be hard to be in this world

tree. sky. concrete. library.

what
what

what would movements made with our brains in mind look like?
what do we know? what do we have that no one else has
why were we made in this perfect image by a god who loves crazy
boys and girls and othergenders
and how do I dance with the ideation so it doesn’t take me out?

these are the things I love about crazy

how we’re still here
this brain shattered into a million beautiful fractal raindrops
the high of synthasia
the way you can lick the inside of your skull
the manic flight and the deep grief sacred low when you feel this
heartbreak of this world

this is how harriet tubman knew what path by the stream to walk
to freedom with by starlight
this is how my mother knew the pilot light went out and and gas
was filling the house
how she knew the drunk driver was around the corner
this is how i knew the pilot light was off inside my body and it
was filling with gas and something was terribly wrong
the way watching angel haze flash her wrist scars on youtube is
like cocaine for me
the only time I have seen someone who looked sort of like my life
on a youtube channel

dear crazy kin
we are the ones whose brains light up and go out
we're this way due to oppression and abuse
but we are also like this because our brains are fucking weird
and maybe we are the secret
and maybe we're just these crazy people trying to get through
the day
maybe don't pay any mind to the poems others write about us
none of them are as sacred
as the poem
of us,
of the poem we write
of ourselves.
We are my favorite poem
I
love
us (41-46).

Appendix B

Poems from *the sun and her flowers* by Rupi Kaur

1.

why are you so unkind to me
my body cries
cause you don't look like them
i tell her (Kaur 62).

2.

my girlhood was too much hair
thin limbs coated in velvet
it was neighborhood tradition
for the other young girls and i
to frequent basement salons on a weekly basis
run by women in a house
who were my mother's age
had my mother's skin
but looked nothing like my simple mother
they had brown skin with
yellow hair meant for white skin
streaks like zebras
slits for eyebrows
i looked at my own caterpillars with shame.
and dreamt mine would be that thin
i sit timidly in the makeshift waiting area
hoping a friend from school would not drop by
a Bollywood music video is playing on a tiny
television screen in the corner
someone is getting their legs waxed or hair dyed
when the auntie calls me in
i walk into the room
and make small talk
she leaves for a moment

while i undress my lower half
I slide my pants and underwear off
lie down on the spa bed and wait
when she returns she positions my legs
like an open butterfly
soles of feet together (80)
knees pointing in opposite directions
first the disinfectant wipe
then the cold jelly
how is school and *what are you studying* she asks
turns the laser on
places the head of the machine on my pubic bone
and just like that it begins
the hair follicles around
my clitoris begin burning
with each zap
i wince
shivering in pain
why do i do this
why do i punish my body
for being exactly as it's meant to be
i stop myself halfway through the regret
when i think of him and how
i'm too embarrassed to show him
unless it's clean
i bite down on my lip
and ask if we're almost finished (81)

- *basement aesthetician*

3.

i felt beautiful until the age of twelve
when my body began to ripen like new fruit
and suddenly

the men looked at my newborn hips with salivating lips
the boys didn't want to play tag at recess
they wanted to touch all the new
and unfamiliar parts of me
the parts i didn't know how to wear
didn't know how to carry
and tried to bury in my rib cage

boobs
they said
and i hated that word
hated that i was embarrassed to say it
that even though it was referring to my body
it didn't belong to me
it belonged to them
and they repeated it like
they were meditating upon it
boobs
he said
let me see yours
there is nothing worth seeing here but guilt and shame
i try to rot into the earth below my feet
but i am still standing one foot across
from his hooked fingers
and when he charges to feast on my half moons
i bite into his forearm and decide *i hate this body*
i must have done something terrible to deserve it

when i go home i tell my mother
the men outside are starving
she tells me
i must not dress with my breasts hanging
and *the boys will get hungry if they see fruit*
says i should sit with my legs closed
like a woman oughta

or men will get angry and fight
said i can avoid all this trouble
if i just learn to act like a lady
but the problem is
that doesn't even make sense
i can't wrap my head around the fact
that i have to convince half of the world's population
my body is not their bed
i am busy learning the consequences of womanhood
when i should be learning science and math instead
i like cartwheels and gymnastics so i can't imagine
walking around with my thighs pressed together
like they're hiding a secret
as if the acceptance of my own body parts
will invite thoughts of lust in their heads
i will not subject myself to their ideology
cause slut shaming is rape culture
virgin praising is rape culture
i am not a mannequin in the window
of your favorite shop
you can't dress me up or
throw me out when i am worn
you are not a cannibal
your actions are not my responsibility
you will control yourself
the next time i go to school
and the boys hoot at my backside
i push them down
foot over their necks
and definitely say
boobs
and the look in their eyes is priceless (94-96)

4. **advice i would've given my mother on her wedding day**

1. you are allowed to say *no*

2. years ago his father beat the language of love
   out of your husband's back
   he will never know how to say it
   but his actions will prove he loves you
3. go with him
   when he enters your body and goes to that place
   sex is not dirty
4. no matter how many times his family brings it up
   do not have the abortion just because i'm a girl
   lock the relatives out and swallow the key
   he will not hate you
5. take your journals and paintings
   across the ocean when you leave
   these will remind you who you are
   when you get lost amid new cities
   they will also remind your children
   you had an entire life before them
6. when you husbands are off
   working at the factories
   make friends with all the other
   lovely women in the apartment complex
   this lonliness will cut a person in half
   you will need each other to stay alive
7. your husband and children will take from your plate
   we will emotionally and mentally starve you
   all of it is wrong
   don't let us convince you that
   sacrificing yourself is

how you must show love

8. when your mother dies
   fly back for the funeral
   money comes and goes
   a mother is once in a lifetime
9. you are allowed to spend
   a couple dollars on a coffee
   i know there was a time when
   we could not afford it
   but we are okay now, breathe
10. you can't speak english fluently
    or operate a computer or cell phone
    we did that to you. it is not your fault.
    you are not any less than the
    other mothers with their
    flashy phones and designer clothing
    we confined you to the four walls of this home
    and worked you to the bone
    you have not been your own property for decades
11. there was no rule book for how
    to be the first woman in your lineage
    to raise a family on a strange land by yourself
12. you are the person i look up to most
13. when i am about to shatter
    i think of your strength
    and harden
14. i think you are a magician
15. i want to fill the rest of your life with ease
16. you are the hero of heroes
    the god of gods (133-135)

5.

you split the world
into pieces and
called them countries
declared ownership on
what never belonged to you
and left the rest with nothing

- *colonise*

(137)

6. broken english

i think about the way my father
pulled the family out of poverty
without knowing what a vowel was
and my mother raised four children
without being able to construct
a perfect sentence in English
a discombobulated couple
who landed in the new world with hopes
that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouths
no family
no friends
just man and wife
two university degrees that meant nothing
one mother tongue that was broken now
one swollen belly with a baby inside
a father worrying about jobs and rent
cause no matter what this baby was coming
and they thought to themselves for a split second
was it worth it to put all of our money
into the dream of a country
that is swallowing us whole

papa looks at his woman's eyes
and sees loneliness living where the iris was
wants to give her a home in a country that looks at her

with the word *visitor* wrapped around its tongue
on their wedding day

she left an entire village to be his wife
now she left and entire country to be a warrior
and when the winter came
they had nothing but the heat of their own bodies
to keep the coldness out

like two brackets they faced one another
to hold the dearest parts of them—their children—close
they turned a suitcase full of clothes into a life
and regular paychecks
to make sure the children of immigrants
wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants
they worked too hard
you can tell by their hands
their eyes are begging for sleep
but our mouths where begging to be fed
and that is the most artistic thing i have ever seen
it is poetry to these ears
that have never heard what passion sounds like
and my mouth is full of *likes* and *ums* when
I look at their masterpiece
cause there are no words in the english language
that can articulate that kind of beauty
i can't compact their existence into twenty-six letters
and call it a description
i tried once
but the adjectives needed to describe them
don't even exist
so instead i ended up with pages and pages
full of words followed by commas and
more words and more commas
only to realise there are some things

in the world so infinite
they could never use a full stop
how dare you mock your mother
when she opens her mouth and
broken english spills out
don't be ashamed of the fact that
she split through countries to be here
so you wouldn't have to cross a shoreline
her accent is thick like honey
hold it with your life
it's the only thing she has left of home
don't you stomp on that richness
instead hang it up on the walls of museums
next to dali and van gogh
her life is brilliant and tragic
kiss the side of her tender cheek
she already knows what it feels like
to have an entire nation laugh when she speaks
she is more than our punctuation and language
we might be able to paint pictures and write stories
but she made an entire world for herself
how is that for art (149-151)

7.

our work should equip
the next generation of women
to outdo us in every field
this is the legacy we'll leave behind (241).

8.

i reduced my body to aesthetics
forgot the work it did to keep me alive
with every beat and breath
declared it a grand failure for not looking like theirs

searched everywhere for a miracle
foolish enough to not realise
i was already living in one (78)

Appendix C

Poems from *When They Come For Us* by Fatimah Asghar

1. **Partition**

you're a Kashmiri until they burn your home. take your orchards. stake a different flag. until no one remembers the road that brings you back. you're indian until they draw a border through Punjab. until the british captains spit *paki* as they sip your chai, add so much foam you can't taste home. you're Seraiki until your mouth fills with english. you're pakistani until your classmates ask what that is. then you're indian again. or some *kind of spanish.* you speak a language until you don't. until you only recognize it between your auntie's lips. your father was fluent in four languages. you're illiterate in the tongues of your father. your grandfather wrote persian poetry on glasses. maybe. you can't remember. you made it up you. someone lied. you're a daughter until they bury your mother. until you're not invited to your father's funeral. you're a virgin until you get too drunk. you're a muslim until you're not a virgin. you're a pakistani until they start throwing acid. you're a muslim until it's too dangerous. you're safe until you're alone. you're american until the towers fall. until there's a border on your back (9).

2. **Old Country Buffet**

Old Country Buffet, where our family
went on the days we saved enough money.
Everyone was in a good mood, even Ullu—
our uncle who never smiled or took off his coat
& dyed his hair black every two weeks
so we couldn't tell how old he was. We marched
single file towards the gigantic red lettering
across the gravel parking lot to announce
our arrival. We, children carrying our rectangle
backpacks brimming with homework, calculators
& Lisa Frank trapper keepers, for we knew this was a day
without escape, spread out across all the booths
possible while our family ate & ate & snuck
food into Tupperware they smuggled in

& no matter how we begged & whined
or the waitresses yelled or threatened to charge
us more money we weren't leaving
until my greedy ass family had their fill.
O, Old Country! The only place
we could get dessert & eat as much of it
as we wanted before our actual meal.
The only place we didn't have to eat all
the meat on our plates or else we were accused
of being wasteful, told our husbands
would have as many pimples as rice we left behind.
Here, our family reveled in the American
way of waste, manifest destinied our way
through the mac & cheese, & green bean
casseroles, mythical foods we had only
heard about on TV where American
children rolled their eyes in disgust. Here
we learned how to say *I too have had meat loaf*
& hate it, evidence we could bring back
to lunch table as we guessed
what the other kids ate as they scoffed
at our biryani. Here, the adults told
us if we didn't like the strawberry shortcake
we could eat the ice cream or jello we could
get a whole plate just to try a bite
to turn up our noses & that was fine.
Here we loosened the drawstrings
on our shalwars & gained ten pounds.
Here we arrived at the beginning of lunch
house & stayed until dinner approached
Until they made us leave. Here we learned
how to be American & say:

we got the money

we're here to stay (30-32).

3. **From**

What They Say	How They Say It	What They Actually Mean
Where are you from?	a short cut to the end, could be a period. a lovesong if they weren't locking a drone on target	you must not be from here. so, where are you from?
آپ کہاں سے ہیں؟	aap kahaa se hai?	there is a wrong answer
आप कहां से हैं?	aap kahaa se hai?	there is a wrong accent
تسی کتھوں ہو؟	Tusi kitho ho?	how did you forget? how will you remember?

(27)

4. ***Shadi***

we've had our worth told to us since always:
two goats & maybe a nose ring or a bracelet.
worth outside our bodies one day
may our names come before our sex
one day may we be more than a body
may we forget the threats of our uncles

selling us off to some man some round
belly & house already brimming with wives
may our names come before *you*
come before *butameez* come before *whore*
may our silhouettes not be followed
not be the last fed & the first to wake
one day may the men in our beds not be strange (37)

1. **Oil**

I'm young & no one around
knows where my parents are from
A map on our wall & I circle all
the places I want to be. My Auntie A,
not-blood but could be,
runs oil through my scalp.
Her fingers play the strands of my hair.
the house smells like badam.
My Uncle Fuzzy, not-blood but could be,
soaks them in a bowl of water.
My Auntie A says my people might
be Afghani. I draw a ship on the map.
I write *Afghani* under its hull. I count
all the oceans, blood & not-blood,
all the people I could be,
the whole map, my mirror.
we got sent home early
& no one knew why. *I think we*
are at war! I yelled to my sister
knapsacks ringing
against our backs. I copy
-catted from Frances
who whispered in when the teachers
got silent. Can't blame

me for taking a good idea
I collect words where I find them.

Two hours after the towers fell I crossed the ship
out on the map. I buried it under a casket of scribbles.

All the people I could be are dangerous.
The blood clotting, oil in my veins.

Someone wrote *anthrax* on the locker
where I keep my body mist. Alexandra
says I smell musty. All the boys laugh.
When was the last time you showered

none of the boys'll laugh.
ImNot. & tomorrow when I show up
Did. Find mice bites in my underwear.
throw my clothes in the laundry again.
mist. IdidImNot. When I get home I'll
myself with Marilyn's cucumber body
letters on metal. Did. So I spray
my locker. ImNot. Can't see those
laugh along. IdidImNot. I can't go to
no one'll touch me. IdidImNot. I
the parts. Did. ImNot. I can harden &
I can make my own armor. oil all
I did I did I did. I'm not I'm not I'm not

The walk to school makes the oil pool my forehead
a lake spilling under my armpits. The news said the oil's
drying up. America is starting wars to get it back. My people
are on the list. We can't survive without oil.
But, who's got money for both gas & lunch?

There's a rough spot above my ear where my head
wages war on itself. Thin skin, my doctor
says. But I stopped letting my Auntie A oil my hair.
My Auntie has baby in her & I know
our pretend game is up. She's not my mother.
No one is. I have no blood. Just my body & all its oil.
The kids at school ask me where I'm from & I have no answer.
I'm a silent girl, a rig ready to blow. The towers fell two weeks
Ago & I can't say blow out loud or everyone will hate me.
They all make English their own, say *that's the bomb*.
I know that word's not meant for me but I collect words
where I find them. I practice at night, the crater
it makes my mouth. I whisper to my sheets
bombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbombbomb
a little symphony, so round. I look up & make sure no one heard (49-54).

5. **Land Where My Father Died**

land of buildings & no good manners land of sunless people & offspring of colonizers land of no spice & small pox land of fake flowers land of shackle & braces made of rope land of wire fences grabbing sky land that mispronounces my grief land that skins my other land that laughs when my people die & paints targets on my future children's faces land that steals & says *mine* land that plants mines & says go back land that poinsoned my mother & devoured her body land that makes my other language strange on my tongue land that says *home*land *security* land that built the first bomb & the last land that killed my father & then sent back his body land that made me orphan of thee I sing. (55)

6. **To Prevent Hypothermia**

After the race my teammates
kicked the boys off the bus
& into the downpour

blocked the windows
with their sweatshirts
peeled the wet clothes

from my skin, each inch
matted-down
disobedient, hair plastered

to my brown legs.
It took two hungry girls
to remove the spandex

from my paling thighs
their blonde hair a cascade
from heaven, water droplets falling

from their roots, stinging
my body. The ports tore
off my shirt & sports bra

my nipples lighthouses
in a swollen ocean, a trail
of dark hair running up

my belly. My whole boat
witness to my small naked frame
a gulf of shiver on the bus.

& their own hairless legs

disappearing into their shorts
skin ripe as peaches, reaching

for my brown body. These girls
who I had stolen glances at
while we changed & wished

I could look like. My locker
room crew. My 5am practice
girls. My lean over the starboard

side so she could pee off the rigor
girls. My two mile run after
eating *Annie's* mac-n-cheese girls.

They took turns rubbing life
back into my bones
offered clothes off their own

backs to keep me from shaking.
My girls, sandwiching me
in their heat until my joints

flowered, until the warmth
budded through my blood.
What more could I ask

than a team willing to undress
their captain, too cold

& rain-glittered to do it alone? (44-46)

7. ***How We Left:*** **Film Treatment**

[Establishing Shot]

Here's the image Auntie P gave me: the street a pool
of spilled light & all the neighboring children
at my grandfather's knee. Kids: turbaned or taqiyahed
or tilakaad or not. How Jammu smelled of jasmine.

[Elevator Pitch]

Yes, I've heard your story—the man who saved my family
before they were my family. The boy who sat, crowned
at the cusp of my grandfather's light, who walked to their place
belt wrapped around books, swinging their shadows to the sun.

[Primary Research]

Ullu remembers it like this: clutching a suitcase of toys
when the men came, machetes swinging the sun red. The year
we found out who we were & who we were not. Muslims boarded
on the bus. Sikh men, laughing: *you wanted a fairytale & now you'll*
get it.

[Rationale]

It takes a lot of work to remember we are nothing.
What has history given us but a fickle home? A legacy
of bloodied men. What's a nation to the sky? Some other wood
to call ours, some other snippet of cloud to pretend we own.

[Secondary Research]

My mom's clean, lean legs pounding the ground. Kirpans
catching light, limbs lost in long grass. Her hand above, searching
for someone's to hold. The red rain falling on the leaves.
The ground: a rose river begging her to swim.

[Working Title]
Pakistan: Disneyland, a fairytale promised. Land of prayer mats & ladoo.
Fat chum chums dripping with pink coconut syrup & all the rupees
to buy them. Land of jobs & tender lamb sliding off the bone. Land
of endless Ramzan's maghrib & nights bouncing with mehndi-ed feet.

[Legal & Ethical Considerations]
History didn't give me a blueprint for loving you, but here I am,
70 years after you crossed a blood-sodden field, building your altar.
History didn't give you a blueprint for loving us, but there you were,
guiding through the tall grass, kirpan clearing a red path.

[Character Breakdown]
They aren't soldiers. Just men. Men who wear matching shirts.
Men who carry machetes. Men who march in formation.
These aren't refugees, just families vacationing to the Promised Land.
We aren't at war. Just neighbors who like to kill each other.

[Sample Dialogue]
I know that man—my teacher—this bus goes right—right—left—did you pack the attah—we'll come back when—yes—Kashmir is out—what's a home anyway—I know that man—a prick at the wheel, golden thread—bus gone left—you wanted a fairytale & now—

[Audio Element: Silence]

Auntie P talks of the apple orchards. The fruit piled into her arms.
Backyard's blossoms perfuming the whole neighborhood.
& my grandfather, yes, she loves the story of my grandfather, teaching
The neighborhood children while all the streetlights fireflyed the night.

[Constraints]
Even with all this light, I can't see past the silence of my family.
The silence of a home I've never lived in, the sins of a people mine
& also not mine. My aunt's long stare, Ullu's borrowed eyes.
His voice's rough engine stalled in the blood-soaked mud.

[Contingency]
I'm a bad researcher: I don't know your name, what you did
other than take my family off the bus once we arrived at the park
-ing lot full of death. This is a love letter, I think. You're a murderer
I think. Did you save us, walk back & slaughter the rest?

[Target Audience]
Everyone wants Kashmir but no one wants Kashmiris.
Aren't I a miracle? A seed that survived the slaughter & slaughters
to come. I think I believe in freedom I just don't know where it is.
I think I believe in home, I just don't know where to look.

[Narrative Device: Flash Forward]
In America they slaughtered a temple of Sikhs because they thought
them us. Here we all become towelheads, amorphous fears praying
to a brown god. Others that become others that look like others.
They don't know our history, its locked doors & heavy whispers.

[Narrative Device: Flashback]
Bring back the books: belted in your hand, swinging
their shadowed love across your body. You—a schoolboy
handsome, sucking a cigarette, never worrying about your lungs
or gut—old man fears hanging on some distant clothesline.

[Visual Element: Filtered Light]
Ullu remembers it like this: the bus turning left. Right. Left?
The lot of parked busses, mountains of Muslims stacked to the sky.
A brown shirt & red crusted blad, running to them. My grandfather's
eyes wide: the boy who used to sit by his knew, now a man.

[Visual Element: Camera Swing]
You're the god of small slaughters. I'll write to you forever.
The man who would not let his teacher die. What stories
were your family told? Are your grandchildren in Jammu still,
throwing rocks at the armies who stain the streets?

[Property Rights]
Everyone wants Kashmir, a useless crown, a ruby fed blood
carved by machete. The past is a land I do not know.
I love a man who saved my family by stealing our home.
I want a land that doesn't want me. I love a land that doesn't exist.

[Denouement]
The image Ullu gave me: the long march through the forest
after, his mother's plea to Allah piercing the trees like a strangled bird.
My mother's eyes blank, as he held her hand, his siblings' squeals drying
in their throats. & there in the horizon: a new country, a broken promise.

[End Credits]

In another life, could you have been my uncle, throwing me over
your shoulders when I was a baby? & when I grew up
I could have taught your children's children's children until
the streetlights came on, until our neighborhood crowded the night (15-19).

8. **White Lie**

Marilyn put me in all the lies to her parents.
The nights she snuck out with boys or to smoke
Black N Milds with her cousin Manny & his best
friend Malik. *Yes Mama Grace, we were watching Pokemon,*

yes Mama Grace we watched it again, yes ma'am we really
do love that movie threading whatever I could
into a cinematic re-creation while Marilyn beamed
bad-girl, gleaming, getting away with everything.

It wasn't long before Mia & Rachel put me in their lies
too, not that they even had anything to lie about.
It just felt good being able to lie & have a friend
no one suspected of treason. We were all virgins

& betted on who would lose it first. I was always last—
Hairy, half-boy half-girl who got good grades
& could do no wrong. I never did anything
wrong. Not even when I let Anita's brother touch me

under the sheet when we watched movies. Or when

Jessica showed me her nipple rings during play
rehearsal & I stopped myself from licking them.
Or when I got so angry at my sister

I filed my nails to points & watched her sleep.
Or how when Aisha tried to commit suicide
I stopped talking to her. I was so much of a lie
I rewrote my family for anyone who listened:

yes, my father lives in Pakistan, a surgeon that stitches
hearts back together, my mother a pediatrician in
New York, auntie to all her patients & yes
of course they love me. But Boston

has better public schools & I get to see them
every holiday & we go on long drives
& talk about what I want to be when I grow
up & what they did when they were my age & how

they met & named me & are just so, so proud (47-48)