

I. Concern of Indian Diaspora in Krishnamurthy's Novel *Six Yards of Silk*

This research proposes to study Indian diaspora in New Zealand, the difficulties experienced by the people abroad, their problems of acclimatization, alienation, cultural loss, and the attempts to construct the identity in Mallika Krishnamurthy's novel *Six Yards of Silk*. The remarkable title *Six Yards of Silk* itself refers to the Indian sari brought in her visit to India which stands for the identity of Indian women like Sharmila in a diasporic condition. The novel narrates the story of the sufferings experienced by Sharmila, her brother Ramesh, her parents Chandran and Vasanti that come to the foreground when Sharmila's aunt Meenamma visits her in New Zealand. Sharmila's parents are dead, her brother Ramesh has gone insane and is lost in boating and the sufferings and guilt of Sharmila have become acute. Meenamma's present to her, an embroidered sari, and her Indianness similar to her mother help Sharmila to overcome the sufferings and establish the Indian connection after a long interval of time. In the suggestion of Meenamma, Sharmila agrees to conduct a memorial service for Ramesh that helps her to ease her guilt she feels being unable to do anything to her brother.

Various problems are faced by Indian immigrants especially Sharmila, after the loss of her brother Ramesh in New Zealand, the Indian diaspora. This research concentrates on the study the nature of the psychological problems in Sharmila after the loss of her brother in the sea. Most of the characters besides the protagonist, Sharmila, face different kinds of problems. In the beginning, the novel relates Sharmila in the unending cycle of cleaning things around her, lack of sleep, lack of control and senselessness about her body, persistent memories of her brother and so on.

Sharmila is in big psychological problem at the loss of her brother. Her memories of home and the loss of her sister Neela also disturb her. She retorts on her memory on the shocking loss of her sister in her childhood and the present loss of brother further aggravates her sufferings. The loss of her brother becomes a catalyst to expose her with the insecurity and psychological shock she experiences in her childhood as well as the cultural loss, the loss of such a brother with whom she could speak Tamil, her mother language in the alien land New Zealand. Through her recollection, we see how the weather and her mood are correlated at the time of her sister's death in her childhood. She is aghast and gloomy like the dark and pouring sky where there is no light, a ray of hope, suggested by the candles. As she runs outside in the rain, Neela was found struck by the lightening near the tap outside. Sharmila faces various other challenges in the diaspora and is haunted by the loss of her familial connection and feels nostalgic.

After the loss of her brother, Sharmila recounts about her brother and the familial and cultural affinity with him. At first, she and Ramesh always speak Tamil together. It is a language that they share with their parents. Over time, they begin to talk to each other in English and reply to their parents in English too. Slowly English infiltrates their minds, taking over completely until thinking in Tamil became a constraint. Sharmila has always spoken Tamil better than Ramesh. She knows more words and they always sound more fluent. Ramesh can still understand and says his tongue does not work that way anymore so he cannot speak Tamil. When they go back to India it would rise up out of both of them again and their mind would start to work in Tamil again, although they continue to speak English to each other. Thus, the loss of the mother tongue and being familiar with the English language and culture is another problem faced by Sharmila.

Other characters face different other problems of diaspora. When Meenamma, Sharmila's aunt, travels to New Zealand to visit Sharmila, she is assailed by the cold weather. "The northerly wind would be cold . . ." is suggestive of the problem of acclimatization in the Indian characters that come to New Zealand from the hot weather of India (8). Ramesh, who is unseen throughout the novel but his death, is the unseen driving force of the novel gets lost due to his mental distraction and craziness. The characters are full of loss in the diaspora throughout the novel. This research analyzes these problems of diaspora extensively.

The basic focus of the research lies in an attempt to answer questions like why the characters living abroad suffer too much that they would be able to cope easily if they were in their homeland and with large number of relatives around and what is reason behind the magnitude of their sufferings. Are the helplessness and mental suffering Sharmila undergoes due to the loss of her brother and her lamentation she expresses for her inability to do anything with her brother while he was with her would be the same if she were in India? What are the problems the people in diaspora likely to experience? The enquiry into these burning questions is the major problem of the research.

Sharmila, the protagonist of the novel has a familial, emotional and socio-cultural affinity only with her brother Ramesh after the death of their parents. This affinity is also gone with the loss of her brother and her New Zealander husband, Keith, is unable to fathom the magnitude and reason behind her acute suffering that is caused not only by the loss of her brother but because of the loss of her affinity that defined her identity in the diasporic situation.

This novel, *Six yards of Silk*, has drawn large numbers of criticism since its publication in 2005. It gave the readers a glance into the sufferings and the mental

condition of the people leaving abroad. The craft of the novel has also been applauded by many of the scholars. Adrita Mukherjee has pointed to the central character's fragmented consciousness and the quest for the meaning of life in her review of the novel:

As Sharmila struggles to come to terms with a numbing grief and an overwhelming sense of guilt, perspectives shift and change, relationships are tested, and new definitions of love and loss, sanity and insanity are born. Sharmila's fragmented consciousness is captured in strongly resonant images. The narrative flows between past, present and an almost surreal could-be land inhabited by Ramesh. The people in the story float through these three worlds, trying to make meaning out of the riddle that is life. (21)

Mukherjee has pointed to the traumatic psychological condition and fragmented consciousness of Sharmila, the protagonist of the novel. Her perspective keeps changing; she traverses between the past and present and tries to embrace the bitter reality of her brother Ramesh's insanity and his eventual loss. She seeks balance of life embracing the new definition of love and loss, sanity and insanity and so on.

Another critic S. Hemalatha praises the novel as mesmerizing one and full of the protagonist's memory of India:

It is a mesmerizing novel, set in Wellington but redolent with memories of India. The story is about the protagonist, Sharmila, who lives in New Zealand with her husband, Keith, and her three sons. The narrative flows between India and New Zealand, through memory and loss, tastes and sensations as Sharmila seeks to understand the mysterious disappearance of her brother, Ramesh. (20)

Hemalatha points to the construction of the protagonist out of the memory and loss, taste and sensations. The protagonist, Sharmila, who has her own family in New Zealand is intrigued in the mysterious disappearance of her brother Ramesh generates the major tension of the novel. She further points to the migrant experience of the writer Mallika Krishnamurthy as well:

Mallika currently lives in Australia with her husband and two sons.

Her debut novel, *Six Yards of Silk*, is a simple but powerful evocation of the experience of migration from South India to New Zealand. The novel questions about what migrants bring with them and what they leave behind. (20)

Like her protagonist, the novelist also lives in Australia as a migrant with her husband and two sons. Her own experiences as a migrant lets her raise questions about the migrants bring with them and what they leave behind.

The critics have raised the issues regarding the psychological sufferings and the migrant experiences but the minute study of the full-fledged diasporic problems seem to be missing in their studies. So this research proposes to study the issues of diaspora minutely in the research.

The postcolonial theorists and diasporicultural critics are drawn into the debate while analyzing the novel. The postcolonial critics and cultural theorists discussing the related issues are the basis for the examination of the novel. The valuable guidelines of the lecturers, library consultation, and internet research help further to shape the research.

Since this research focuses on the problems of Indian Diaspora in New Zealand, it is very fruitful to discuss the general features of diaspora beginning from its root. 'Diaspora' is a word of Greek origin which refers to the dispersal throughout

the world of people with the same territorial origin. A descriptive notion, dispersion is often given religious or ideological connotations such as in the Hebrew concept of galut (exile), which is filled with messianic aspirations of 'Return' (Cohen 6).

Understandings of the diasporic condition may vary both within and between diasporas. Diasporans may wish to be absorbed into their new environment, but when they attach to their dispersion a particular significance that merits enduring loyalty, they attempt to remain distinct from the 'others' (Cohen 42) – as a diasporic community. The institutions and networks which they establish then lead them to adopt the usual pattern of an ethnic group grounded in an awareness of their own primordial particular features like distinct religion, origin, or language. So, many of the critics define diaspora in terms of ethno-national character. Gabriel Sheffer sees political orientation in the ethno-national diaspora as he writes in his book *Diaspora Politics*:

An ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. (9-10)

The ethno-national character thus, leads the diasporas to maintain connection to their homelands and showing solidarity to the other diasporan people of the same origin. This further helps them to maintain their identity that leads the diaspora to unify and be active in social, cultural and political spheres:

Based on aggregate decisions to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. (10)

The diasporas not only confine to the boundary of the host country but they show inclination to the cross-national boundaries, creating identity similar to their motherland in the alien host countries. All other aspects being equal, however, because of its commitments for the cross national boundaries and link it to a transglobal entity, a diasporic community is seemingly less permeable to tendencies of assimilation than non-diasporic ethnic groups. This means that its unavoidable adjustment and acculturation to its environment do not inevitably lead to loss of all concern for its original identity.

Establishing a diasporic community, however, is not a uniform process and it may vary from one community to another – in the same society – and in different countries. Robin Cohen distinguishes between the solid diaspora, with strong ‘solidarity’ (6), marked by powerful myths of a common origin territorialized in an ‘old country’ (143), and the liquid diaspora, which is constructed through new cultural links and a substitution of sacred icons. Adding the in-between model of ‘ductile’ diaspora, he discusses three models running from historical reality to postmodern virtuality. One novelty of our era, however, resides in the frequent sense of attachment to a territorialized origin that relates collectives of the same origin to each other transnationally – including the original homeland. ‘Transnationality’ (7) implies that dispersed groups perceive themselves as forming ‘one diaspora’ (16) that, under an appropriate name, also encompasses the country of origin: the ‘Jewish diaspora’

(4) refers to Jews' dispersed communities; the Jewish world to the same, but including Israel.

This notion can be expanded to include cases presenting peculiarities but still responding to the principle of dispersed communities bound by transnational allegiances. It still holds, for instance, for cases referring to more than one original homeland. Chinese diasporans may refer to mainland China, Taiwan, or Singapore, and sub-Saharan Africans whose ancestors were deported as slaves to the New World from different places in Africa refer their origin to the Dark Continent as a whole – unlike Africans who emigrated after their nations won independence. In other cases, sociocultural processes in the receiving setting bring about pan-diasporic tendencies among an amalgamation of groups originating from distinct countries but culturally and socially close to each other relative to their new common environment.

Latin Americans become Hispanics in the USA while still conserving features marking their diverse specific origins. Muslims from Arab countries who have settled in the western world tend to see themselves – and to be seen – as a Muslim diaspora at the same time as they continue to display Moroccanness or Algerianness. Not too different is the case of the Kurds, who originate from places that are not united under the same national roof, but who share a common legacy facilitating their coalescence.

Still another growing category in this era of multiple diasporas consists of 'returnees' (43). Germany, Japan and Israel witness the immigration of people who in the past saw themselves as diasporans from these countries but decided for ideological or instrumental reasons to 'return home' (92). These returnees have absorbed the culture of their diasporic environments and may eventually rebuild a new community where the previous national token becomes a diasporan identity and vice versa, continuing the diasporic code in inverse mode.

Also qualifying under the notion of transnational diaspora are groups who exhibit a transnational commitment despite the absence of a homeland, and concretize their sense of forming a global entity only through transnational organizations, networks, cultural values, or religious convictions. Jews saw themselves as ‘one people’ for centuries before the creation of Israel and, in a similar vein, Romans see themselves as a people encompassing the globe, without specific territorial attachment. This kind of diaspora is quite exceptional and requires conceptualizations of its own, unlike the very different case of the communities crystallizing in post-Soviet Europe, which Rogers Brubaker named “accidental diasporas” (12). These cases, like the ethnic Russians stranded within the borders of newly independent Baltic states, were engendered not by voluntary migration but by changes in national borders. This kind of diaspora retains ongoing relations with its original homelands and displays resistance to the disappearance of its original languages and cultural reference.

The common denominator among all the individual cases pertaining to these categories consists of their each considering themselves part of a transnational whole that eventually includes the original homeland(s), which may be sovereign or territorialized minorities in one or more countries.

In the recent years, we see a rise in the number of young and talented writers from various diaspora. In tandem with the transnational moment, writers like Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, Salman Rushdie, and Helon Habila have become household names, denoting new wave of writers from postcolonial nations who have seized the English language as their own. And, with an ever-growing, global population who share migration, relocation, and displacement, as well as a new, academic focus on

issues of the transnational moment, diasporic literature has boomed to encompass a large slice of the fiction market.

Excess of diasporic literature floods publishers and bookstores from all corners of the globe, but no group has been more successful in marketing their experiences than the Indian diaspora. From the first wave of diasporic Desi lit, featuring powerful writers like Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai, to the most recent boom in South Asian literature, including Booker and Pulitzer winners Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri respectively, the ethnicity of the moment in diasporic fiction is truly Indian. Roxanna Kassam Kara from *Nirali Magazine* argues Desi success has stemmed partially from a Western readership's need for more than their "meat-and-potatoes" narratives (2). Yet, Kassam Kara also readily acknowledges the interest in diasporic Indian narratives has part of its origins in the demographic shifts in Western readership. As Kassam Kara attests: "[Desi] writing also fills a need from second and third generation desis who are demanding books that they can relate to" (2). With growing populations of Indian Americans, Englishwomen from Pakistan, and Bengalis living in Great Britain, themes that address and tackle the everyday realities of racism and identity politics present in diaspora space are in high demand.

Many of the people of the third world migrate to the European countries to avoid the horrible consequences of civil wars in their countries, to get better education and employment opportunities and many have utopian notion about developed countries that the life standard becomes better in those countries. But as they go to those countries, they have to struggle for survival. They begin to experience racial discrimination and suffer the pain of lack of cultural belongingness in diaspora. The nostalgia of their homeland becomes acute. In the time of partition many of the Indians migrated to Britain, America and other European countries due to political

unrest in their countries. Mallika Krishnamurthy is one of them. From her experiences, she is able to sketch the characters like Sharmila in the setting of Indian diaspora of New Zealand.

The chief objective of the research is to explore the problems faced by people who migrate to other countries to find jobs and better prospects of life in postcolonial situation. To highlight their difficulties and explore their mental ordeal is the objective of this research. Even though this research basically studies the diasporic problems, the analysis is totally textual. Only textual evidences are brought into the light in the analysis. The direct experiences of the people of diaspora are incorporated due to the limitation of time and necessary resources to see them personally.

This research becomes a remarkable contribution for the study of diaspora and the postcolonial problems of cross-cultural migration. Some of the migrants of the diaspora turn very excited and enjoy the alien cultural territory but most of them experience the unprecedented sufferings and various problems like alienation, rootlessness, identity crisis and so on. This research analyzes the problems of diaspora extensively that are very useful to help the other researchers see through the issues of diaspora.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with introductory outline of the present study. It introduces critical review and the writer and her characters in relation to their diasporic circumstances and their problems. Thus it presents the bird's eye view of the entire research. The second chapter aims at providing the theoretical methodological reading of the text briefly with both the textual and theoretical evidences. It attempts to examine the problems of diaspora and their crucial impacts in the characters to generate the sense of cultural loss, identity crisis, racial discrimination, ambivalence,

hybridity and so on. On the basis of various scholars and theorists about diaspora, the novel has been analyzed in this chapter. It further sorts out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the research. This part serves as the core of the present research. The third chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the earlier chapter, focusing on the outcome of the entire research. The various logical conclusions are summarized as proof that the psyche of the characters in diasporic condition face various injustices and sense of loss as a result of the lack of own cultural identity.

II. Identity Crisis and Reconstruction of Cultural Identity in Mallika

Krishnamurthy's *Six Yards of Silk*

This research analyzes Mallika Krishnamurthy's *Six Yards of Silk* with the study of Indian diaspora and its problems in New Zealand. The basic attempt of this research is to figure out the problems, both physical and psychological, among the characters, the sense of dread, cultural loss, ambivalence, hybridity, humiliation, identity crisis, nostalgia and sense of belongingness. Sharmila, the protagonist of the novel, is residing in New Zealand married to a New Zealander, Keith. She belongs to a middle class family in Mumbai, India. Sharmila and Keith are joined by Meenamma, Sharmila's aunt who is visiting Sharmila's family to comfort them in times of crisis. Sharmila is coping with the loss of her brother Ramesh soon enough after the death of her parents, Vasanthi and Chandran. There is profound sense of loss and nostalgia experienced by Sharmila in diaspora throughout the novel. It is a depiction of Sharmila's struggle to cope with the psychological turmoil in diaspora and reconstruction of the cultural affinity to her Indian culture to cope with the situation and normalize.

The novel is divided into twenty two chapters. The beginning chapters like "Weave", "Border", "Tassel", "Fall" etc. depict Sharmila's current preparation to welcome her aunt Meenamma to New Zealand. They also depict her psychological suffering at the loss of her brother Ramesh and the reactions to cope with it, and the basic problems an immigrant faces in diaspora through the experiences of Meenamma in her visit to the alien country New Zealand. There is the depiction of the difficulty of Meenamma to acclimatize or to adjust herself in the totally different and alien climate of New Zealand. Gradually, various difficulties of the diaspora emerge and

Meenamamma helps Sharmila to come out of some of the problems like sense of loss, the nostalgia of her mother and alienation.

Sharmila's Indian past and her mother Vasanthi and her dreams to excel in the alien country had caused sense of insecurity and loss. There had been the sense of insecurity and struggle when their family traveled to the alien land of New Zealand in expense of their culture:

Vasanthi had to make her own way through everything. She missed so much in those early days of immigrant life. She had longed for the moisture in the air, for the heat and monsoon rain, for fresh coconut, mango and the fragrance of jasmine. She craved the smells of camphor and *vibuthi* in the temples, the sound of ringing bells and the closeness of people all around her. People were barely visible here. Tamil voices whispered to her at night, reminding her how far away she was. Her dreams were crimson and orange, warm with the sun, the air filled with aromas of her mother's cooking that she could smell but never taste.

(51)

The family of Sharmila missed India and there was always the dread of unfulfillment of dreams. They felt vulnerable during the days of their struggle. They missed India and the cleavage to their Indian family members. This sense of loss and dread in the alien land has been materialized with the loss of Ramesh with whom she has cultural affinity besides the blood relation. This past also contributes to lead Sharmila to the alienation and make her feel more vulnerable, lonely and insecure. The writer uses many flashbacks so as to point the origin and the nature of Sharmila's nostalgia and sufferings in the novel though they may lack equal accuracy in their past but they are constructive aspects of the alienated and nostalgic condition in the current situation.

The narrative of the novel flows between India and New Zealand, through memory and loss, tastes and sensations as Sharmila tries to explore the mysterious disappearance of her brother, Ramesh. The death of her brother haunts her making her obsessive about cleaning. The pivotal point of the story is the arrival of her maternal aunt, Meenamma, from India. Sharmila's mother, Vasanti, and Meenamma are very close to each other and share every familial issue. After Vasanti's death, it is Meenamma's first visit to New Zealand. The only thing that Vasanthi hides from Meenamma is about her son's mental illness. Ramesh's sudden mental break down shatters her and she consoles herself by believing that it is merely an infection. When she enquires Sharmila about Ramesh, she is shocked to hear his disappearance. Sharmila's sense of loss intensifies with this unprecedented happening.

The historical and cultural contexts of the immigration to New Zealand are important for the novel to examine the sufferings of the diaspora. Cultural connection and the familial optimism that they would make their dream come true in the new land they are going to migrate are crucial for their forsaking and loss of Indian culture. The optimism is well reflected in the conversation between a local official and Sharmila when she goes to the local administration office in India to certify her birth date so that she could apply for the citizenship in New Zealand:

'I can tell you are living in phoren', Sharmila missed a beat and then realized that he meant 'overseas', 'for a long time. Why do you want to be forsaking your mother country, giving your statehood to them?

They will always be treating you like a second-class citizen.'

Sharmila's tone was as frosty as the air-conditioning.

'Can you guarantee that I will be treated as a first-class citizen here?'

(28)

When the Indian official points to the possibility of being treated as a second-class citizen in New Zealand, Sharmila counters him that all the people are not treated as first-class citizens in India too. So, she and her family are elated of the possibility of the fulfillment of the dream in New Zealand. They have suppressed the inner fear of insecurity and loneliness in the alien land for sake of their dream–fulfillment. This sense of cultural insecurity and loneliness has come to the surface and overwhelms Sharmila when she loses her brother and not only the brother but her cultural connection to the Tamil community of India. Her loss is evident in the following quote:

As Sharmila sat there, surrounded by peeled potatoes, years of the effort of being between places tumbled out in her tears. Loss, emptiness and chaos chased each other. Meenamma’s hand, warm on her head, anchored her and made sure that the aloneness did not consume her. It made her float and spin like a compass with no north. When she ran out of tears she still couldn’t speak. Meenamma gave her a glass of water and a box of tissues, then sent her to bed like a baby in need of a nap. (29)

Loss, emptiness and chaos chase each other haunting the mind of Sharmila. In such a loss, Meenamma’s arrival from India is soothing for her because she would not only provide her company but the motherly love as well as the connection to her cultural values. She is the one who dries her tears and sends her to rest so that she would come out of the shock and recover from the cultural loss and gain a sense of belongingness. Nostalgia and the desperate longing of belongingness to own homeland have been clearly seen in Sharmila’s behavior.

Sharmila's nostalgia and repulsion to the alien and tormenting New Zealand soil he is residing is the result of her quest for identity. The idea of identity is the result of crisis of belonging as Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* writes, "The idea of 'identity' was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the 'ought' and the 'is' and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea—to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea ..." (20). Thus, the gap between the reality and the imagined utopian expectation upon the migrated country is the cause of the crisis of belonging in the people like Sharmila in the Indian diaspora in New Zealand. This crisis of belonging or the nostalgia becomes very intense and ferocious in her in the desperate longing for her cultural identity as the writer narrates the apathy of the New Zealand administration to look for her lost brother. The apathy and indifference towards the Indians in New Zealand is evident in the very beginning of the novel:

By the time the dog had sniffed out the boat and its owner had called the police, no sign of the note was left. Police enquiries established that a dark-skinned man had rowed out to sea late one night and the boat returned without him.

An Indian man had been reported missing. Since the two description matched, the police sought no one else in the connection with the incident and concluded that an unfortunate accident must have occurred. (Emphasis Original)

It is clear from the opening of the novel itself that the Indian people are not taken seriously and they are neglected. There is a sense of insecurity and accidents in New Zealand. The police close the investigation as there is no evidence left of the drowned man. There is the perpetual apathy towards the Indian people, culture and they are

alienated. The sense of this insecurity and alienation is always there. In the later parts of the novel, we guess that the neglected, drowned Indian man probably is the missing brother of Sharmila. Seeking perfect cultural attention is the sense of cultural identity in Sharmila. She rediscovers the cultural identity and performs a final ritual of her lost brother in Indian way only after her aunt Meenamma comes to her help.

The concept of hybridity is a famous post colonial trope used by Homi K. Bhabha. Ashcroft et al. define hybridity as “One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in post-colonial theory, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (*Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies* 118). The England is the contact zone where the Indian and English cultures come into the contact due to the migration in the post-colonial scenario:

In New Zealand . . . they wore same clothes as the people in the street outside, then they went back to India and tried to be invisible there by wearing the same clothes as the people in the streets outside. Even though their skin gave them away in New Zealand at least they could hide under their clothes. In India, while their cousins hankered after blue jeans and T-shirts, they felt too foreign in them. No matter what they wore, the rickshaw drivers charged them double the local price.
(79)

We see the hybridity and sense of loss in the quote. Sharmila and her brother's dress up habits and the social treatments are explained here. They feel too foreign when they wear jeans and T-shirt in India while it is common for their cousins. They are treated as the foreigners because of their dress ups and charged double fare by the rickshaw pullers whatever Indian they try to appear. In New Zealand too, they are

treated as foreigners because of their skin color. The hybridity, cultural dislocation and sense of loss are always there after they migrate to New Zealand from India.

Astrid Wonneberger in his essay “The Invention of History in the Irish-American Diaspora: Myths of the Great Famine” defines diaspora as the groups that have left their countries and maintained their common identity and continuity of their cultures. He writes clarifying the term diaspora:

Maintaining a common identity is particularly important for groups who had leave their country and now try to maintain their culture in the new environment. In the last decades, more and more such groups have been called ‘diaspora’ or used this term to label themselves, although the discussion about the features necessary to define a group as a ‘diaspora’ has not been concluded yet. (118)

Even after roughly defining the diaspora, Wonneberger is not certain about the features necessary for defining the particular group as diaspora. In Desai’s novel, the people migrated to New Zealand from India and they have shown the solidarity visiting each other and talking about their provincial characters back home. Though there is the rift among the provincial characteristics, they are united with their Indianness. It is clear in the novel that the family of Sharmila continued to maintain Indian identity and solidarity till the death of Sharmila’s parents and brother. But as they passed away in the span of time, Sharmila becomes alone and her belongingness of the Indian culture receded and she feels frustrated and alienated.

The sense of belongingness and common Indian identity of Sharmila is established only when they perform the final ritual of her lost brother in Indian way. The rituals performed for the dead person is very important to establish the collective

identity. So, the memorial of Ramesh became very important to give Sharmila a sense of belongingness to the Indian cultural root:

He didn't come.

A memorial was so permanent. It meant consigning her brother to time past. Allowing him to linger only as a memory, no longer as a hope. Surrendering his body to the sea. Although her mind resisted, her body was tired of struggling to stop his face from growing blurry, and tired of seeing him suspended in the ocean. She needed one last memory of him, a memory of land and air. (120)

Sharmila had grown weary of the hoping her brother to come alive and her body started to give way. So, the memorial became very important to bid him proper farewell and help Sharmila establish the collective cultural identity with her brother.

In the memorial, the children want to fly kites in the name of their uncle. On that particular day everyone pays their tribute to Ramesh by sharing their experience they had with him. While all are flying the kites, Sharmila has taken a silk sari, the six yards of silk, which she did not permit him to cut and make some shirts out of it to the ocean. He had always the wish that he would cut it to make him the shirt since the time of its buy in Coimbatore in India which is reflected in the conversation:

‘Why don't we buy two saris, pay more to give these poor women extra and make you feel more righteous of course. You wear one as a sari and I'll cut the other one up and have a few shirts made.’

Sharmila had gasped.

‘A sari is a sari. You can't cut it up.’

It is just six yards of silk,' he said, 'no different from any other six yards of silk.' They had gone on and on arguing, arms waving, working themselves into steam. (86)

Since Sharmila did not let Ramesh cut the sari though he fought with her to make shirts out of them when he was living, she repents of the decision at last. She takes the six yards of silk to the ocean and throws it to the ocean with the hope that the sari, the cultural token, could connect them together to forge the collective identity. She goes to the top of the rocks, unfolds the sari and hurls it above the sea. She thinks that it will reach to her brother. The sight of the sea seems to beckon Sharmila, "The waves rolled in and out, hypnotizing her, drawing her in, tempting her out. Cool and inviting." (157). The sea tempted her to follow Ramesh's sari, "It called to her to come with it, to find him. The sari sang that it would wrap itself around her, care for her and lead her to her brother" (158). Somehow, she steps back from the rock and reaches the place where everyone gathered. Finally, Sharmila feels relieved. Her husband Keith and Meenamma feel happy to see Sharmila coming to her usual cultural self.

The common cultural identity as Indians is the very feature that defines the diasporic identity. Wonneberger relates common cultural identity as the defining characteristic of diaspora as he observes:

A diaspora consists of a relatively large number of people who maintain a common cultural identity which they use to distinguish themselves from other groups, as well as the host society. They achieve this, for example, by referring to a common homeland, a common origin, common traditions and a concept of a common history

which may be constructed and the elements of which may be selected to fit them into this concept. (118)

For Wonneberger, maintaining a common cultural identity is very important for the constitution of diaspora because the diaspora needs to show itself as different from the other groups and identified as the distinct one is very important for their existence in their host country. So, the common Indian heritage, origin, history, traditions have played very important role to keep Sharmila and her Indian people united that defines them as the Indian diaspora.

In the post colonial period, the concept of diaspora or transnationalism became famous because of the large number of people from the formerly colonized countries started to migrate to the Western countries in high rate of migration. In his essay “Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of dance partners?” Thomas Faist observes that the “diaspora and transnationalism are sometimes used interchangeably” (9). Transnationalism refers to the belief in a person that his/her nationality does not exist in the host country where s/he lives rather his/her nationality is rooted to the country from where s/he has migrated. It is the persistence of the national attachment of a migrated person to his/her homeland and the sense of detachment to the host country. So, the term ‘transnationalism’ can be used interchangeably with ‘diaspora.’ But diaspora is wider term covering wide range of problems of the person living in the alien country and transnationalism is narrower as it focuses only on the persistent affinity of a person living in alien country to the national sentiment of the homeland and its political institutions. As Karen Fog Olwig observes:

The notions of ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ have emerged as central terms in this more recent understanding of migration, among scholars as well as migrants, in particular those migrants who are well

educated and articulate. In James Clifford's overview of the idea of diaspora, its main features are summarized as 'a history of dispersal, myths/ memories of the homeland, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship'. (55)

Olwig connects diaspora with migration as it plays the central role to form a diaspora. People from the Third World and ex-colonies migrate to the West in the search of better opportunity, education and life standard. Sharmia raises her own family in New Zealand for sake of better future and dream of quality life. She is one of the migrants from India, the Third World; she migrates to New Zealand in her childhood with her parents and her family starts pursuing the goal of prosperity in the land of opportunity. The family struggles hard and over time, Sharmila completes her studies in New Zealand and gets married to Keith, a New Zealander.

Sharmila's suffering is intense at the loss of her brother. Her dream has shattered and she feels lost. She grinds her teeth as she sleeps on her bed. She stares to the ceiling and the ocean in which her brother was lost fills her mind:

The night wind chased leaves under a half moon as the rest of the family slept. Sharmila lay grinding her teeth. She was the one jet-legged now. As she stared at the ceiling, her eyeballs dried out and the wind moved shadows about her. The ocean filled her mind, and the slime of kelp in her fingertips. (42)

As soon as Sharmila's mind is filled with the memory of the ocean, she feels she has been grabbed by a kind of branch of the sea-plant. She experiences the dreadful nightmare and grounded on her firm belief that her brother has drowned and his body has been entangled by the kelp found in the depth of the sea, she utters the word 'kelp' when her husband, Keith, enquires her about the reason of her difficulty:

Great frond swayed, closing in on her, creeping up her fingers and arms, winding around her waist, reaching down her legs and up her torso, slipping around her neck, a gooey rope tightened to a noose. Sharmila struggled, choking. She shook Keith awake.

‘What happened?’ Keith switched on the bedside lamp and squinted at her.

‘The kelp.’

Only the wind stirred. (42)

Sufferings of Sharmila is evidently consuming her and suffocating her. Sharmila’s response to her brother is her response both to her sister and brother’s loss. Her sister had also died accidentally in India, struck by lightning and her brother had gone. It becomes unbearable because she is not confirmed that her brother has actually been dead as he is only lost. She frequently experiences the nightmare in which she sees her brother drowned in the sea by kelp. She wakes up horrified with a sense of emotional turmoil. To the worry of her husband, she wakes up muttering and chanting the word ‘kelp’:

‘What kelp?’ Keith frowned at the windows dancing on the ceiling as the wind hush-hushed outside.

‘Ramesh, the kelp tied him up and held him down until he drowned. He’s out there somewhere in the ocean.’ Sharmila’s eyes were wide, she was a child waking from nightmare, her voice coarse with unshed tears.

‘We don’t know what happened.’

‘I just told you what happened, the kelp, it held him down, it drowned him.’ (43)

Her husband tries to console her pointing to the uncertainty of her claim. He points that they actually have no idea what happened to Ramesh but Sharmila is very pertinent in her claim. There is no point in arguing with her. She is in commanding mood because of the stiffness of her thoughts and beliefs. He has no option but to be submissive without challenging her eyes:

Keith looked away from her fierce eyes. Facts were not going to help him here. Sharmila stared straight ahead, forcing the slippery kelp away from her, trying to dry her skin of slime, willing herself to see Ramesh laughing as he pushed the boat out to sea by itself. She made her mind watch him turn and walk to airport and catch a plane to a warm, sunny place. He was swimming alive in a blue ocean with pretty tropical fish, no kelp forest in sight. And then it came into the edge of her vision, a tendril of seaweed. It chased him and crawled over him, encircling him. Keith put his hands on her clenched fist and tried to unfurl her fingers. (43)

Sharmila's eyes are fierce, she has lost her touch with the reality and the facts of the reality are useless for her. She feels as if she is forcing the kelp away from her. Keith wants to make her easy and puts his hands and tries to loosen the fingers that are strongly clenched into the fist. Her body thus, is gone stiff. No outside means are working in Sharmila. Suddenly Sharmila's sense of insecurity grows and she feels that she would be totally helpless if her husband leaves her. So, she wants her husband to promise her that he would not leave her like Ramesh:

'Tell me you won't disappear.' Sharmila looked at him, unblinking eyes bright and black.

‘I am here now,’ he said. To say any more was to lie. The yellow duvet cover looked incongruously sunny against the blackness of Sharmila’s mood.

‘Come on, let’s go and look at the children.’

Sharmila couldn’t feel her body at all. She was floating beside herself as Keith put her legs on the floor and walked her into Oliver and Sanjay’s room. . . . As she watched them breathe, Sharmila breathed with them. (43)

It is very hard for the husband to console and control her and bring back to the reality so has to capitulate to her whim. He can not commit her honestly that he would not disappear because human life is unpredictable. So, he has to divert her to her children so that she would feel easy or come to normalcy. Only after she sees the children breathe, she feels she is alive. The loss of her brother has exposed her to the vulnerability and insecurities and thus, his loss magnifies sense of loss.

The people face various problems in diaspora. As we look at the very beginning, we see Meenamma and the new Indian immigrants to New Zealand suffering from the difficulty of acclimatization. Meenamma is not familiar with the climate of New Zealand. She is unaware of the time of sun rise and sunset or she feels difficult to adjust her internal clock to the time of New Zealand:

They were all unsettled for few days. Meenamma was uneasy with the time change. She tried hard to stay awake all day to re-set her internal clock. Her body felt like she was still travelling in the ghastly aeroplane and, unable to stand it, she collapsed into an exhausted sleep at four in the afternoon, only to wake at midnight after everyone had gone to sleep. (23)

The mismatch of time and weather are the problems of acclimatization. The first problem a person faces in diaspora is the problem of acclimatization. Acclimatization is the problem that is seen when the climate of the homeland and the climate of the diaspora mismatch. The people of diaspora struggle to adjust them to the alien climate of diaspora. This problem is faced by Meenamma as soon as she reaches New Zealand. She finds it very difficult to get used to according to the time of New Zealand. Adjustment to the weather is another challenge:

Sharmila hovered at the airport. The sky was clear blue with grey clouds far on the horizon. Coming from the dusty orange sky of Mumbai, Meenamma would be assailed by the harsh southern light. The northerly wind would be cold compared to the humid stillness she was used to; Sharmila had better make sure there was a heater in Meenamma's room. (8)

This quote clearly mentions about the possible difficulty Sharmila would face in New Zealand. An Indian immigrant faces the cold and unpleasant weather as soon as s/he migrates to a different country in contrast to the hot weather of India.

Besides the problem of acclimatization Sharmila is also nostalgic to her Indian, familial surrounding. In the novel, Sharmila is desperate to welcome her aunt Meenamma after the loss of her brother in the sea is focused from the very beginning. Sharmila is expecting her maternal aunt, Meenamma, to visit her in New Zealand from India but she has been mentally distracted from her usual life that she spends most of her time silently cleaning the house. Her sense of routine is gone and the cleaning has become her sole work. In the night before the arrival of her aunt from India, unable to sleep on her bed from restlessness, she remembers to clean the statues of the deities as her aunt demands to offer them the thanks for the safe journey. So she

goes to clean them after midnight. Her futile hope that the god of good luck, Lord Ganesh would return her brother becomes evident when she expects impractically for her brother brother to come out of the belly of the deity:

Why hadn't she looked in here before? If she rubbed hard enough, would her brother step out from the new shining silver belly of the god of good luck? Would he stand before her, a miraculous genie, alive and full-fleshed? She had looked everywhere, including the corners of shelves and the cracks of floors. Why wouldn't he come back? Although her fingers burned more she kept going, apologizing to Ganesh with an old prayer learned from her mother on a long train ride through India in the stifling heat. (5)

Sharmila desperately wants the cultural affinity and familial affection. So her feeling of lack of culturally close family in New Zealand is his quest for a community. She is expecting Menamma desperately and keeping track with the cultural proceeding to take care of the deities. More than the place, caring family with cultural awareness becomes important for her in diasporic condition. Olwig explores the connection among family, ethnicity and the place for a diaspora:

The family also provided a certain sense of community that involved, apart from periodic reunions at major family events, the extension of help and favors important to the livelihood of individuals. The similarities in the two groups of people become apparent when the 'ethnic' identities and practices of these people are interpreted in relation to the lives they have lived rather than in relation to their derivation from a particular place. Place is not in and of itself a given entity that can be used as a natural point of reference in ethnic,

diasporic, or transnational identity. Rather it is constructed as people define and give meaning to a particular physical locale in the course of their lives. (68)

Olwig does not give much currency to place as place is constructed point of reference. More than the place of origin, ethnicity is focused in his study of diaspora. But as we study Sharmila and her diasporic strivings for the construction of identity she has both the sense of place and ethnicity. Unlike the Olwig's assertion has the place has the lesser importance for the construction of diasporic identity.

By means of the memory of childhood and India, Sharmila tries to construct her childhood and cultural belongingness. This memory is very important for a person in diaspora as it connects him/her to his/her place of origin and reconstruct both the culture and place of origin. As Wonneberger suggests:

The country of origin takes a central place in the process of maintaining a collective memory and solidarity. This country can exist in reality or in memory, its image can be realistic or mystical. In any case, it forms the centre of a diaspora to which its members are to return eventually. In this context, it is the wish to return which is decisive, not the act of returning, although some diasporic members might in fact return. The idealization and romanticization of the image of the 'homeland' can provoke different means of support for the home country, including the fight for and the founding of an independent state. (118)

Memory is thus, very important for the construction of one's place or culture in diaspora thereby reconstructing his/her identity. Sharmila tries to construct her cultural identity through memory but it is too painful because she has the painful

memory of the death of her sister Neela in India. Only after the arrival and care of Meenamma, she develops the sense of Indianness and the belongingness of the homeland.

The globally accepted English language has been criticized and the local and cultural are valorized in the conversation which shows the resistance on the part of the marginalized diaspora to the dominant, hegemonic English culture. Susanne Schwalgin in her essay “Why Locality Matters: Diaspora Consciousness and Sedentariness in the Armenian Diaspora in Greece” asserts the need to understand the locality so as to understand the diaspora:

Anthropologists should not ignore the significance of locality for the construction of identities, despite their excitement about diasporas as prototypes of transnational communities. However, accepting that locality matters does not entail the resurrection of a binary opposition between the local and the global. On the contrary, locality matters in a global space of relations where places are not existing per se but are constructed as ‘communities of relations’ . . . Experiences of social relations do play a central role for these communities of relations and thus, in the processes of the construction of locality. (89)

The importance of locality is valorized in Sussanne’s essay. For her, locality does not act as the binary opposition of the global values rather it exists in the difference of its identity and helps shaping the community relations. The difficulty to maintain the locality in diaspora is one of the problems in diaspora that may lead to the diasporic identity to crisis.

Sharmila losses her locality and the only speaker in her mother tongue with the loss of her brother. It has the greater loss as it gives her the identity crisis and she

stops realizing who she really is. On the very day of brother's loss, Sharmila's behavior underwent drastic changes; she entered the bathroom and started cleaning the things around her crazily. She scrubbed sinks, floors, toilets and everything that she feels necessary for cleaning. It continues worrying her husband Keith and others:

The following day, Keith had walked into the kitchen for a cup of coffee and found her scouring cupboard doors. She was monosyllabic and moved on to the windowsills with a toothbrush to get into the corners. Something he had never seen her or anyone else do. He usually gave the windowsills a cursory wipe when he cleaned the windows. The children danced around her, squabbling and making noise and mess. She tidied up after them, got them what they what they wanted and went back to her cleaning. (6)

Her husband had never seen such behavior from her before. She went monosyllabic, unwilling to speak as usual and answering the queries in short and curt phrases as if they were forced out of necessity. The usual way of cleaning, the cursory wipe of the windowsills was gone. She did not reply to phone calls and her familial and social life went drastically different:

The phone rang and she didn't answer so her friends left message on the answerphone, trying to find out what was happening. She didn't return their calls. He soon realized that she was not stopping to eat. He made her toast and tea, which she swallowed reluctantly. Keith had watched as she cleaned some more, surrounded by toothbrushes, steel wool, scrubbing brushes and sponges, buckets, bowls and all manner of cleaning fluids. (6)

The sense of identity and belongingness are shattered for Sharmila as her brother is the only one remaining family member who could bridge the cultural gap between India and New Zealand. The reconstruction of the identity and regaining the sense of belongingness becomes vital for her.

As Meenamma has the awareness of decentering of the Indian identity that is shaped by Indian culture she wants to reconstruct the identity in its wholeness as Andreas Ackermann suggests in his essay “A Double Minority: Notes on the Emerging Yezidi Diaspora”:

The awareness of a growing dispersion, decentring, interpenetration, and general complexity of globalized and transnational communities is reflected in anthropology as a rising concern with ‘identity’ rather than with ‘culture’. Such identities escape in part from the familiar either-or classifications and become defined more by a logic of ‘both-and’, implying not cultural wholeness anymore, but partial and overlapping identities instead. (156)

For the reconstruction of Sharmila’s Indian identity to its wholeness, Meenamma tries to convince her about the suffering and its treatments. She provides her homely environment and motherly care in Indian way that helps her regain her sense of Indian identity.

On the one hand there is the sense of loss in Sharmila that the imperial values have been apathetic to the Indian culture and the Indians are living as a insignificant life to the imperialist culture in the diaspora, on the other hand she is abided by the politics of identity with the politicization of the place or locality to reconstruct new diasporic identity. As Susanne Schwalgin further writes in “Why Locality Matters: Diaspora Consciousness and Sedentariness in the Armenian Diaspora in Greece”:

Identifications with imagined 'homelands' and 'nation states' as well as with de-territorialized 'cultures' and 'origins' are seen as central for the construction of diasporic identities. However, the irony lies, according to Gupta and Ferguson . . . , in the fact that 'displaced people cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places and communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality'. The self-definition of many diasporas is based on essentializing notions of unequivocally territorialized identities, for example through identification with an imagined homeland or nation-state. (73)

For the construction of diasporic identity, Sharmila identifies herself with imagined homeland and Hindu deities. But since the homeland is only in his memory it is not compatible with the reality. Meenamma's role becomes prominent here and her arrival brings back the Indianness to Sharmila in the novel and she becomes able to cope with the sense of loss and reconstruct her imagined homeland and Indian identity.

III. *Six Yards of Silk* as a Diasporic Novel

This research has studied Mallika Krishnamurthy's novel *Six Yards of Silk* to pinpoint the Indian diaspora and its problems. This research has figured out the problems, studied both the physical and psychological problems of the diasporic characters, the sense of dread, cultural loss, ambivalence, hybridity, humiliation, identity crisis, nostalgia and sense of belongingness. Sharmila is the protagonist of the novel who exposes various diasporic problems as a resident of New Zealand. She is a dark skinned Indian by cultural root, living in New Zealand married to a New Zealander, Keith. She belongs to a middle class family in Mumbai, India before her migration to New Zealand. The pivotal force behind the novel is the loss of Sharmila's brother Ramesh who has presumably drowned himself in the sea in the bout of mental disorder. His loss leads Sharmila to the state of dread, the dread to lose her husband. She experiences the sense of alienation and cultural loss because Ramesh is the only member in her family who could talk in her mother tongue and give her the sense of Indianness in the alien land. Sharmila's reaction of the loss is seen from the very beginning of the novel.

Meenamma, Sharmila's maternal aunt visits her family to comfort them in times of crisis. Sharmila is mourning at her brother's loss in her own weird ways while she prepares to welcome of her aunt. The loss of her brother Ramesh soon enough after the death of her parents, Vasanthi and Chandran has brought many changes in her. She has lost the sense of time and she spends most of her time cleaning the house losing the touch with reality. She experiences profound sense of loss and nostalgia throughout the novel. Her suffering is the suffering of diaspora. The novel is a portrayal of Sharmila's diasporic struggle to cope with the psychological

turmoil and reconstruction of the cultural affinity to her Indian culture with the help and care of her aunt.

A sense of cultural loss, alienation, emptiness and chaos pervade Sharmila's psychology. Meenamma's arrival from India is soothing to her in such a loss, because she does not only provide her company but the motherly love as well as the cultural belongingness. She dries Sharmila's tears and makes her rest a lot so that she would come out of the shock and recover from the cultural loss and gain a sense of belongingness. Nostalgia and the desperate longing of belongingness in Sharmila's behavior are evident throughout the novel.

Talking about the physical problems experienced by the characters, Krishnamurthy has depicted the problems of acclimatization in the characters that are new to diaspora. Meenamma faces the cold of the alien land when she visits Sharmila, and the difficulty adjusting herself to the time of New Zealand. She sleeps when others are awake and she wakes up in the midnights. The problem is physical problem while the psychological problems and identity crisis are not physical. They are experienced by the characters who reside in New Zealand for a long time.

The title of the novel is very remarkable to highlight the reconstruction of Indian cultural affinity and identity in Sharmila. The title, *Six Yards of Silk* literally means a piece of sari that Sharmila and Ramesh buy together in Coimbatore while they visit India. Ramesh used to demand Sharmila to give the piece to him so that he could make a shirt out of it. But Sharmila does not give it to him. She feels guilty for not giving him the six yards of silk to Ramesh. As a sister, she could not fulfill a brother's demand which becomes painful to her after his loss. At the final ritual Sharmila conducts to bid Ramesh a farewell in the suggestion of Meenamma, she throws the six yards of silk in the sea where Ramesh has supposedly drowned himself

and imagines that he finally gets his demand fulfilled. The ritual and satisfying the demand of her dead brother gives her cultural closeness to Indian culture and helps her to establish her Indian identity. It gives her a sense of belongingness and she becomes normal coming out of the loss making the novel typical diasporic voice.

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