

Post-9/11 Indian English Diaspora Fiction: Contexts and Concerns

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Abstract

Authenticity of the representations of the “real” problems of the Indian diasporans in Indian diaspora fiction has often been questioned by the critics as some ten or twelve years back, in the hands of most of the Indian diasporic writers, the problems of acculturation often got reduced only to the difficulty in mastering native manners and customs. Eminent Indian diaspora writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai, were, indeed, silent on religious, ethnic and racial problems that the Indian diasporic communities encounter in the host countries. Post 9/11 developments, mainly in the US, however, have compelled some of the Indian diaspora writers to respond to these issues. Marina Budhos’s *Ask Me No Questions* (2007), Kazim Ali’s *The Disappearance of Seth* (2009) and Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* (2004) document post-9/11 hate crimes against the South Asians/Southeast Asians in general and the Muslims in particular in the US that expose the racialised fabric of the nation. It is interesting to observe that unlike Budhos, Ali and Kunzru, the big shots of Indian English diaspora fiction are still silent on issues that could be unpalatable, mainly, to the readers of the hostlands. This article, by focussing on the three novels mentioned above, will examine who are throwing light on the other side of the moon and why. In so doing, it will take up the novels not in terms of their chronological appearance, but in terms of the degree of their engagement with the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Keywords

Diaspora, production, reception, acculturation, religion, hate crimes

If we note that most of our diasporic writers are still occupying that safe space of their original homelands, we need to figure out why this pattern persists. Are

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they afraid of writing about the place they are standing on? Or is it that they are not really standing here but back there? Or is it because they have realized it is more marketable to stand there and not here? (Parameswaran³²³)

In the above observation, Parameswaran was clearly hinting at the interface between the forces of the market and the production and consumption of Indian English diaspora fiction and was, perhaps, also suggesting that submission before the market made the fiction of the Indian English diaspora writers inauthentic in terms of the representation of the “real” problems of the Indian diasporic communities in the hostlands. It was difficult to question such an observation even some ten or twelve years back, as in the hands of most of the Indian diasporic writers, the problems of acculturation remained skin-deep²and barring a few rare exceptions like Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man* (1972) or Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* (1996), the diasporic novels of the Indian writers remained myopic to serious racial and ethnic problems faced by the Indian diasporic communities in the hostlands like the UK and the US. In fact, intra-community class and caste conflicts and tensions were also mostly ignored by these writers.³ Post-9/11 developments, however, have made some of the Indian diaspora writers respond to these issues. Marina Budhos’s *Ask Me No Questions* (2007), Kazim Ali’s *The Disappearance of Seth* (2009), and Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* (2004), document post-9/11 hate crimes against the South Asians/Southeast Asians in general and the Muslims in particular in the US that expose the racialised fabric of the nation. It is interesting to observe that unlike Budhos, Kunzru and Ali, other well-established writers of Indian English diaspora fiction in the West are still silent on issues like racial and ethnic conflicts/tensions that could be unpalatable, mainly, to the Western readers. This essay, by focussing on the three novels mentioned above, will examine who are throwing light on the other side of the moon and why. In so doing, this essay will take up the novels not in terms of their chronological appearance, but in terms of the degree of their engagement with the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

On October 25, 2001, in the *Prepared Remarks for the US Mayors Conference*, John Ashcroft, the former Attorney General of the US, declared: “On September 11, the wheel of history turned and the world will never be the same” (qtd. in Cainker 181). The world, indeed, did not remain the same

² In one of my essays on Indian diaspora fiction, I too, quoting Parameswaran, raised the same question and argued that barring a few exceptions, like some of the novels by Salman Rushdie and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, contemporary Indian diaspora fiction (especially those of Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Anurag Mathur and Uma Parameswaran) “usually avoids serious engagement with issues relating to racism, ethnicity, identity and multiculturalism and fails to get beyond photographic descriptions of some places of the host countries like markets, streets and workplaces with occasional peeps into the life of the natives” (94).

³ For detailed discussions on these issues, see Paranjape and Pal.

particularly for the Muslims in the US after 9/11. US response to the attack was the War on Terror, in which Bush asked the “good Muslims” to take side against Islamic terrorism.⁴ Allied to this were, of course, major changes in the US security policies. These included the creation of the USA Patriot Act, the formation of the Homeland Security by reorganising the Immigration and Naturalization Service, federal policies and practices of mass arrest, detention without charge, special registration for the Muslim immigrants of a few specific countries, deportation and a continuous surveillance by FBI (Cainker 180). All these were basically done to fix the responsibility of the attack on the Muslim (and Arab) Americans. The Muslims in the US were immediately brought under the scanner of FBI. Prioritising the issue of national security, Robert Leiken of the Nixon Centre declared that “if the needle resists discovery, target the haystack” (qtd. in Cainker 180). Immediately after the attack, on September 18, 2001, Attorney General Ashcroft boasted of the success of FBI’s surveillance: “To date FBI has received more than 96,000 tips and potential leads: more than 54,000 on the website, nearly 9,000 on the hotline, the toll-free WATT’S line, and more than 33,000 leads that were generated in the FBI field offices.” Commenting on this boastful statement of Ashcroft, Cainker writes: “These tips and leads identified specific Arab and Muslim Americans as suspicious persons – whether citizen, permanent resident, or visitor –but eventually led nowhere, turning up not a single person with a verifiable plan to attack the US or its people” (181). In fact, despite Bush’s assurance⁵ that not even a single person would be harassed because of religious or ethnic identity, with time the situation worsened and the hate crimes against the Muslims increased.⁶ Gradually not only the Muslims, but the South Asians and Southeast Asians in general also became the objects of hate crimes and surveillance. The three novels that this paper analyses record their author’s responses to these uncanny developments mainly in the post-9/11 US.

Ask Me No Questions is a story told by Nadira, a teenage Bangladeshi girl who, along with her family, is in America on expired visas. The family primarily moved to the US to fulfil Nadira’s smart and intelligent elder sister Aisha’s dream of making her career in the country of her dream. After the expiry of the visas, Nadira’s Abba did try to get residency but could not because of the callousness of their lawyer who did not file their papers properly. After 9/11, when Nadira’s Abba wanted to register himself under the Special Registration Act, Nadira’s uncle (who, with his family, had been in the US for long) told him not to do that as it would invite further troubles. The family, ultimately taking Aisha’s advice, decides to seek shelter in Canadian asylum. The novel, in fact,

⁴ For detailed discussion on this issue, see Mamdani and Arjana.

⁵ President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People. See “President Declares Freedom at War with Fear.”

⁶ See “Hate Crime Reporting, 2001.”

begins with their journey to the Canada border. They cross the border and are told that the Canadian asylums are all filled up with refugees from the US. While returning to the US, immediately after crossing the border, Nadira's Abba is arrested and is put into a detention centre. Nadira's mother also stays in the shelter (though not behind bars as she is not arrested) to help her husband in whatever little ways she can. Aisha and Nadira go back to stay with their uncle and aunt. Initially they are told that their father will be released on production of a five-thousand dollar bond. But as the investigations are on, new charges of lying about their residence on application paper and (a more serious charge) of donating money to a political association through a mosque are brought against Nadira's father. He is detained in the shelter and, if the charges are proved, the two sisters apprehend, he will be deported. Aisha, who is the smarter and cleverer of the two sisters (in fact, when the novel opens, Aisha has drawn the attention of her teachers as a brilliant student and is expecting to have a scholarship for her higher studies and also to become the valedictorian of her college), initially tried her best to prove the innocence of her father even by contacting an INS officer. But things get worse as their uncle is also arrested for not having the right legal papers. He, however, is released from jail but is given only thirty days to correct his immigration status. All these developments take a heavy toll on Aisha and she has a nervous breakdown. Now it is Nadira (who is fat and thought to be dull and afraid of doing anything independently) who steps into the crisis and tries to save her father. It is she who, by submitting concrete evidence in the court, proves that the money given to that political association was given by a Hossein, who wrote his name with an "e" between "s" and "i," unlike her father who writes his name Hossain with an "a." The novel ends on a positive note. Nadira's father is released from jail and Aisha also succeeds in delivering a touching speech at the valedictory function of her college. There is also a suggestion that the Hossain family might get the residency in the US.

Interestingly, the features that mark a typical Indian diasporic novel, are some of the important features of *Ask Me No Questions* as well. Problems of acculturation occupy a large portion of the novel. From the moment of their arrival in America, Nadira's mother, in particular, feels the anxieties typical of a new diasporan without adequate expertise in the language of the hostland and with a traditional mindset. Just after arriving at the New York airport, Nadira's mother's hand felt tight in Nadira's hand and her "mouth became stiff when the uniformed man split open the packing tape around our suitcase and plunged his hands into her underwear and saris" (7). Initially, she was afraid of going out and forced her husband to have an extra lock on the door. She "secretly" talked of going back especially "in the winter when the sky turned dark and the cold sliced her ankles and blew up the sleeves of her coat" (25). She even did not like to go to restaurants as she thought that she would not be able to answer the

questions of the waiters in English. Aisha, however, tries hard to acculturate into the hostland by observing the body language, dress and speech patterns of the American kids:

She began to study the other kids – especially the American ones. She figured out how they walked, what slang they used. Sometimes she'd stand in front of the mirror practicing phrases like 'my mom' or 'awesome.' The next day she'd come back from school turning the phrase a little differently, shrugging her shoulders in that way that American kids do to show nothing has ruffled them. (24)

Aisha even begs her mother to buy her the flare-leg pants and the macramé bracelets that the American girls wear. These attempts on Aisha's part also foreground the intergenerational conflict within the diasporans, so common in Indian diasporic fiction. The intergenerational conflict reaches its peak in the relationship between Nadira's cousin Taslima (who is in an affair with the American Tim, a human rights activist) and her father who is a strong patriarch and does not want to give any freedom either to his wife or to his daughter. When Nadira's aunt got herself a part-time cashier's job at a ninety-nine cent store, he screamed: "I didn't come to this country so my wife could work" (37). The novel also looks like a typical Indian diasporic novel in its use of the Bengali/Indian words and phrases like *Pohela Boishakh*, *shalwar kameez*, *kurta*, *chicken tandoori*, *biryani*, *pooris* and *alugobi* to mark the exotic dress, food and festivals of the Bengalis. But despite all these, *Ask Me No Questions* can never be called a typical Indian diaspora novel as the representation of the problems of acculturation in the novel is never skin deep and gets integrally related to the trauma and anxiety that a Bengali Muslim diasporic family undergoes in the wake of 9/11 in the US.

Settling down in the US has never been easy for Nadira's family. Nadira's Abba had to do all kinds of jobs to earn the bread and butter for her family:

Once we got here, Abba worked all kinds of jobs. He sold candied nuts from a cart on the streets of Manhattan. He worked on a construction crew until he smashed his kneecap. He swabbed down lunch counters, mopped a factory floor, bussed dishes in restaurants, delivered hot pizzas in thick silver nylon bags. (7)

A paragraph like this clearly tells the readers from the beginning that this novel is not going to tell the story of the problems of acculturation of the middle-class software engineers or doctors or university/college teachers; it will tell the stories of those unskilled labourers of diaspora for whom survival in the hostland is a *real* challenge. In fact, early in the novel, while talking about her mother's anxiety at the New York airport, Nadira informs the readers that from

the beginning they knew that they would stay past the expiry date of their visas in America:

... we were afraid because we knew we were going to stay past the date on the little blue stamp of the tourist visa in our passports. Everyone does it. You buy a fake social security number for a few hundred dollars and then you can work. A lot of the Bangladeshis here are illegal, they say. Some get lucky and win the Diversity Lottery so they can stay. (7)

Things, however, became more difficult than what Nadira's Abba had imagined them to be, particularly because of the US government's surveillance on the Muslim immigrants through Homeland Security, Patriot Act and Special Registration Act after 9/11.

As the novel progresses, the readers are face to face with the raw angst and trauma that Nadira's family has to negotiate within their desperate attempts to stay in the US as illegal migrants. Pages after pages are given to describe how the Muslims are not only under the surveillance of the state but also tortured by it. Under the Special Registration Act, Muslims over the age of eighteen from a few specific countries like Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Pakistan and Bangladesh are asked to register themselves. And when some of them did, they were either "thrown in jail or kicked out of the country" (9). In fact, one of the consistent impressions that the novel creates is that the Muslims in the US consistently keep on disappearing. Nadira's uncle tells her that Ali-Uncle, of whom Nadira is very fond and on whom she depends a lot, has told him about the sudden disappearance of four men. Nadira's aunt tells her that one friend of her Uncle "from work was picked up and thrown in jail" (45). Ali-Uncle himself tells Aisha and Nadira: "I can't tell you how many of these stories I keep hearing. Every other day there's another man who comes in here, or a wife who doesn't know where her husband is" (72). How brutally those kept in the detention centre are tortured also becomes clear when Nadira describes the condition of her uncle after his release or of her father in the court during the trial. Nadira's uncle comes out of jail with the help of his wife who is holding up a "thin and wobbling" (100) man who limps. After reaching home, Nadira observes "bruises and cuts on his forearm" (101). In the court of the detention centre, Nadira even cannot recognise her Abba as her old, familiar Abba:

But the man who walks in is not the Abba I know.... Ragged yellow stains show under his arms, and there's little tear at the elbow. His pants sag off his hips. I cannot believe this is the same Abba who sometimes took more than an hour to bathe, carefully oiling his hair and clipping his toenails. (131)

The atmosphere of racial hatred permeates the entire novel. When Nadira's uncle laments that under the Special Registration Act the Bangladeshis are

treated the same way as the Pakistanis, it is Taslima who points out that all “brown people are the same to them” (40). What is interesting about Budhos’s representation of the racial hatred is her attempt to make subtle distinctions between the American state and its citizens as well as within the citizens. *Sadachbele* Tim is not only Taslima’s lover (whom she marries ultimately and with whom, unlike her parents, she settles down in the US) but a human rights activist who works against the brutal atrocities of the state. The greatest support of Aisha in the school is her white teacher Mr Fired lander, who does whatever he can to make Aisha get the fellowship. Even in the detention centre, Nadira’s mother receives moral and financial support from some women who are American. The woman guard Doris does not give Nadira “a hard time about getting upstairs” and calls her mother “the Purple Lady with the Sing-Song voice” (128). The women workers of the cafeteria where Nadira’s mother has her meals also have become “fond” of her and charge her “for only half the dishes she orders” (128). One of these women even tells Nadira: “I never seen a lady so brave. Every day she sits outside that courthouse doing what she has to do” (128). In fact, Nadira’s mother also keeps on growing in the course of her fight for her husband. After her husband’s release, she is no more the same old timid female immigrant, unsure of her fate in the US. She does not walk *behind* her husband anymore but rather “gently leads him along while he gets his strength back” (142). Nadira and Aisha even are stunned when they see their mother “wearing a western-style dress – it’s a blue and red pattern with a thin yellow belt that clinches tight at her waist” (154), on the day of their final hearing about residency.

Like Budhos’s *Ask Me No Questions*, Kazim Ali’s *The Disappearance of Seth* is also set in the immediate context of the 9/11. The novel that moves between New York, Baghdad, Paris and Cairo in a spiral, lyrical way, revolves around Seth, a European Jew who lives in America and comes to the city of New York in June 2001, just a few months before the attack. It shows how seven characters (Seth, Zel, Layla, Jack, Salman, Saif and Adil) of different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds respond to the aftermath of 9/11. At the centre of the novel is, of course, Seth (all other characters in direct or indirect ways are related to him), who on the day of the attack walks away from his apartment and disappears. This, however, is the impression of Zel, an American chef of a small restaurant, who lives with Seth in New York. After 9/11, Zel puts up missing posters of Seth in many places of the city, fails to trace his whereabouts and fears that he is dead. Seth, who is actually alive, is rescued from a racist attack – he was attacked as he was mistakenly considered an Arab by a gang of young Americans – by Layla Fouad,⁷ an Iraqi artist (whose

⁷ In “A Note” to the novel, Ali writes: “The character of Layla Fouad had her initial inspiration (and took her name) from the actually existing Iraqi painter Layla Al-Attar who lost her life in the missile attack of June 3, 1993, on Baghdad that also destroyed her home and studio. The

paintings were all destroyed during the First Gulf War) and an employee in the office of Iraq's UN Ambassador at that time. Layla, after rescuing Seth, paints him lying among the debris of the twin towers, "naked and limp, as if sleeping" (50). When Zel sees this painting of Layla, she understands that Seth was alive even after the attack and that he deliberately did not keep any contact with her. By the time Zel meets Layla and sees the painting, Seth has disappeared again and Layla knows nothing of him. In fact, Layla, who after this meeting with Zel, almost becomes her soulmate, goes back to Iraq to stand by her family when the War on Terror begins and Iraq is ransacked by the US army. At the end of the novel, a car bomb explodes in a marketplace in Baghdad and a young American is "taken into custody, suspected of working with the insurgents" (196). Adil and Zel see this young American on television and identify him as Seth.

The Disappearance of Seth not only shows how an otherwise innocent American citizen like Seth (who is actually a European Jew) becomes an associate of the so-called "terrorists," but also brings to the fore the hate crimes and the consequent trauma that the non-white Americans had to bear with immediately after 9/11. In fact, through short poetic passages, Ali brings out the real meaning of fear in post-9/11 US, a country shadowed by distrust, suspicion and hatred. Let us have a look at one such passage:

However, just as the man was about to panic, there was a lighting flash – and in that moment of clarity, what the man thought was a snake, was revealed to be merely a rope.

The story isn't about the man's foolishness, knows Zel, which everyone has, but about his identification with his fear. (35)

This identification with fear also has huge impacts on Layla who thinks that it is she who has fallen down and not the towers:

Then Layla realizes with the chilling panic that wakes her, it's her: she is the thing, incinerating, falling down from the sky into her own mouth, drowning her. (62)

Other than these poetic, figurative representations of fear, there are hard facts used by Ali to foreground hate crimes in the wake of 9/11. Layla feels disturbed when she reads in the paper of "the murder of a Sikh man in Arizona" (56). Ali does not stop at this. In a matter of fact manner, he, rather, provides the readers with a list of other "unresolved" hate-crimes:

similarities between these two figures end there; the character of Layla Fouad is in no way meant to be a representation of Layla Al-Attar; all the characters in this book are purely products of the author's imagination" (n.p.).

It is added as a statistics to a list of unresolved hate crimes: Punjabi convenience store clerk killed in Arizona. Jewish youth mistaken for Arab assaulted in Brooklyn. Bookstore owner killed in Carrboro, North Carolina. Writer found dead in her car. (145)

Ali also gives a vivid description of the attack on Seth, which he spreads over the novel to re-view it respectively from the perspectives of Layla and Seth. Seth is attacked by a group of young Americans the day on which he sees his “missing” poster pasted by Zel. The Americans mistake him for an Arab primarily because of his beard and his dreadlocked hair, the two changes that Seth made to his countenance after the attack. He is attacked by the group without any kind of provocation from his side. He only does not respond to their call and because of this silence is first called “Fucking rag-head sand-nigger” (95) and then beaten up severely. The incident as seen by Layla is described by Ali with graphic details:

A young man is curled up on the sidewalk, trying to shield himself from more kids. Six or seven others stand around him, kicking his sides, his back, his legs. (57-58)

Layla, risking her life, rescues Seth who, when rescued, was breathing heavily with a bleeding nose.

The novel, however, does not simply stop by documenting the post-9/11 hate crimes or by showing how and why Seth becomes an associate of the Iraqi “terrorists.” It emerges as a strong critique of the philosophy of hatred. At one point when Seth tells Layla that he should not have been saved at all as Layla’s presence did not give him the opportunity to strike back, Layla tells him that she did not save him as such; in fact, she would have saved anyone found in that situation. She further tells him that she would have, even, saved those boys (who attacked him) from Seth had he struck back:

‘It may not have mattered to me who I was running towards that night but it has mattered to you. I did save you. I did save you from being hurt badly, or worse. I did it without thinking. I did what anyone would have done. It didn’t matter that you didn’t want to be saved. It mattered to me that I saved you. I would have been the violent one had I not done that. And if you had started hurting those boys or punching them, I would have saved them from you.’ (131)

Layla does not stop at that. She continues:

‘What is it?’ she asks but he cannot answer. ‘Is that what you think of first, when someone strikes you that you have to strike them back? How does that make you any different from the boys who attacked us?’ (131)

In fact, listening to these words of Layla, Seth, for the first time after 9/11, thinks that he should have phoned Zel. The representation of Zel, similar to those American women who help Nadira’s mother in *Ask Me No Questions*, clearly questions the stereotyping of the Americans as anti-Muslim or anti-Arab. Of all the characters in the novel, it is Zel who suffers the absence of Seth in her life the most; it is she who sticks those missing posters around in New York to find out Seth and it is she who decides to “wage a cultural war of her own by making the daily specials at the restaurant Arab and Middle Eastern dishes” in the Fall of 2002 (43).

Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*, the first of these three novels to come out in the wake of 9/11, does not directly refer to the event. It, though, is set in the immediate context of 9/11 and shows how an Indian computer programmer Arjun is suspected to be a terrorist and is haunted by the FBI for indiscreetly unleashing a virus, called Leela after the name of an Indian actress, who played the role of a soldier’s daughter in a Bollywood film *Crisis Kashmir*. Arjun, who was always interested in the activities of computer viruses, comes to the US in 2000 and tries his luck in different jobs before he gets the job of an assistant tester, which was not “a position for a fully fledged virus analyst” but “the next best thing” (53), in Virugenix, a company located in Redmond, Washington, famous for producing anti-viruses. Arjun loses his job in June 2002⁸ and then decides to unleash the virus not with any intention of damaging the cyber network but as (what he thought to be) a strategy of getting back his job. As the hero of *Crisis Kashmir* rescues Leela, the heroine of the film, from a cob-web of terrorism and international intrigue, he too thought of solving the problem of the Leela virus, his own creation, which, he fancied, would enable him to get back his job: “I meant to cause a little disruption, just a small problem, because then I could step in and solve it and be the hero” (243). But things become more serious than were expected by Arjun. The unleashing of the virus, contrary to the expectations of Arjun, has a worldwide impact. It is thought to be an instance of cyber terrorism, a Muslim fundamentalist attack, even an attack by al-Qaida. First, the American government does not recognise the incident as a terrorist attack, then after consulting “the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Infrastructure Protection Centre and the Central Intelligence Agency,” it reconsiders its views and takes the attack as a threat to the security of the US (153). A probe begins and soon Arjun, while

⁸ Though the year is not mentioned in the novel, it has been successfully inferred by Pei-chen Liao in *Post-9/11 South Asian Fiction: Uncanny Terror*. See page 164 of the book.

waiting for a bus for San Diego, finds his face “on screens all around the bus terminal,” released by FBI declaring him to be a cyber-terror suspect (214-5). After reaching San Diego, Arjun releases a video, explaining how his crazy action was led by personal interests, apologising to Leela, and claiming no connection with any terrorist associations whatsoever. This video, however, fails to create any impact on the American government. In blind rage, the FBI kills an innocent Southeast Asian teenager taking him to be Arjun, while Arjun becomes a social outlaw.

Foregrounding Arjun’s plight, the novel not only shows how a naïve, crazy action could be fatal to an inexperienced immigrant but also critically looks at the hysteria of the US government in the wake of 9/11. In doing so, Kunzru’s tone becomes, sometimes, bitterly ironic. In an official press meet of the US government, in response to a question by a journalist of *The New York Times* about whether the national security of the country is really under threat, the President’s spokesman says:

Any attempt to compromise or mitigate our ability to function effectively in terms of our critical infrastructure, whether that be in the realm of telecommunications, energy, banking and finance, water facilitation, government operational activity thresholds or the smooth or unhampered running of our essential emergency services, must be viewed as taking place within a framework strongly suggestive of deliberate negativization, threat or hostile intent. We are in the process of investigating and assessing the current situation, and will move with the utmost alacrity and vigour to institute proportionate, reasonable and devastating countermeasures appropriate to the ultimate outcome of that threat assessment. (154)

The fairly ambiguous answer of the spokesman, divided into two long sentences full of bureaucratic jargons and clichés, indicates “a high level of anxiety” (Liao 68). The ultimate effect of this speech, however, is comically ironic. Kunzru’s irony reaches its peak when Kunzru describes how the FBI kills the innocent unidentified Southeast Asian teenager in a motel room in San Ysidro. For this operation, FBI works with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, weapons specialists from the police, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. They first obtain written order for using maximum force, then break into the motel room and blindly shoots the innocent civilian down.

In the excerpt with which this paper began, Uma Parameswaran asked whether the Indian diasporic writers were afraid of writing about the hostland, whether they were standing *here* (in the hostland) or back *there* (in the homeland). The essay in which Parameswaran raised the question was actually a pre-9/11 plenary talk delivered at Red River World Literature Conference in April 2000. These three novels do prove that some of the Indian diasporic writers dare to stand in the homeland and talk about unpleasant issues. The

way these three novels have documented the post-9/11 hate crimes and the oppression of the South and Southeast Asians by an inhuman state machinery could indeed be analysed from multiple perspectives. Trauma theorists would love to examine the representation of the individual and the collective trauma of the victims of the aftermath of 9/11 as shown in these novels using both psychoanalytic and social perspectives on trauma. The role of that state and its relationship with the non-white Muslims and South Asians/Southeast Asians could also be analysed using Derrida's notion of autoimmunity or Agamben's concept of the *homo sacer*. As is evident already, in this essay, I am not interested in such analyses of these texts. I would rather like to raise some other questions related to the production and reception of these texts.

It is really interesting to observe that these three novels are written by writers who are not big names of Indian diasporic fiction. None of the famous writer, except Rushdie and Diva Karuni,⁹ have even bothered to write a single line on the biggest crisis faced by the South/Southeast Asians in the West after 9/11. How to interpret this silence? Does it mean that these writers want to continue with that same tract of writing that fetches success for sure? Does it mean that they are still standing *there*? Why are, again, the Indian diasporic writers of the new generation standing *here*? All the three writers taken up in this paper were born and brought up in the hostlands. Two of them (Budhos [born to an Indo-Guyanese father and a Jewish-American mother] and Kunzru [born to a Kashmiri Pandit father and a British Anglican Christian mother]) are of mixed parentage. Is, therefore, the memory-stock of the homeland of these writers very low? In fact, in what sense and how far can India be *the* homeland for Budhos and Kunzru? Do they know the hostland better than the so-called homeland? Is it why they are writing more on the hostland than on the homeland? Why are, again, these three writers writing so explicitly on post-9/11 atrocities by the US state? Could it be that as second generation diasporans, they were less exposed to racial hatred and had less problems in acculturating into the hostland than the first generation diasporans and then post-9/11 developments made them suddenly aware of their –and of all coloured people's –status as the “other” in the hostland? Does this sudden change in their realisation make them react so poignantly?

It is also interesting to note that two of these three writers (Marina Budhos and Kazim Ali) are from the US and one (Hari Kunzru) from the UK. New generation Indian diasporic writers of other multicultural countries like Canada or Australia have been, by and large, silent on the issues of racial/religious/ethnic hatred. Does this mean that the South /Southeast Asians are more vulnerable in the wake of the post 9/11 atrocities in the US and the UK than their counterparts in other multicultural countries in the West? Is that

⁹ Both these critics are cited in Liao's book.

the reason why these countries have become the sites of production for novels like these? What about the reception of these novels? Have these novels been adequately noticed? Uma Parameswaran's essay, on which I am falling back again and again, has been published at least twice after it was first delivered as a plenary lecture in 2000.¹⁰ In the last of these two prints – the one that came out in 2007 – Parameswaran could have mentioned at least two of these three novels, but she has not, even by way of a footnote. The same could be said about another important essay by Jasbir Jain, "The New Parochialism: Homeland in the Writing of the Indian Diaspora," in which she argues almost along the line of Parameswaran. The essay was first published in 2001 and later included in her 2015 book *The Diaspora Writes Home*. In it, as in Parameswaran's essay, there is no reflection of 9/11 novels written by the youngsters of Indian diaspora. It could be argued that academics seldom find enough time to re-work on their already published essays. True. But what about the new essays and books on Indian diaspora? Till date, I have seen only one significant book on post-9/11 Indian diasporic novels.¹¹ Are we, actually, taking note of the changes slowly occurring in the domain of Indian diasporic fiction?

Is it then that the new generation writers of Indian diaspora are not really indifferent to the realities of the hostlands, rather, we, the academics, are apathetic towards them? A question like this, I know, will generate further questions. Have these novels been properly promoted and marketed by the publishers? Does the myopia of the critics, then, owes to the lack in marketing and promoting these novels? But can this be really cited as a strong reason in this age of net-marketing and net-shopping, when a book (like the ones discussed in this article) is just one click away from the stack? Are we, then, to blame ourselves? In *Ask Me No Questions*, Nadira, once tired of playing hide and seek with her teachers, neighbours and friends about her illegal identity, lets the readers know that they are not the only illegals in America; there are indeed many who could be spotted if their signals are picked up correctly:

We're not the only illegals at our school. We're everywhere. You just have to look.... To find us you have to pick up the signals. (29)

In a similar way, it could be said that some of the new generation writers of Indian diaspora are standing firmly in the hostlands. If they are not seen, the

¹⁰ Parameswaran revised the plenary lecture for a volume titled, *Diaspora and Multiculturalisms: Common Traditions and New Developments*, edited by Monika Fludernik and published by Rodopi in 2003. The essay was then anthologised again in her *Writing the Diaspora* (2007).

¹¹ I am of course referring to Liao's book. However, as the title suggests it is not exclusively on Indian diasporic fiction and deals with only one of the three novels discussed in this article, i.e. Kunzru's *Transmission*.

fault is ours, not theirs. We just have to look. We just have to pick up the signals.

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