



CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN THE WORK OF JHUMPA LAHIRIS

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Abstract:

Transnationalism creates links between individuals, communities, and countries as well as alterations in the social, economic, and cultural spheres of both the countries of origin and of destination. This article's goal is to examine the effects of commerce, technology, and migration on contemporary life, society, culture, and literature. It focuses on encounters that cut beyond ethnic, linguistic, and national boundaries. Transnational is a term used by Merriam Webster to describe "someone who extends and transcends national boundaries" (Webster). The Latin preposition trans, which meaning "across," "beyond," and "outside of," is used as a prefix. Therefore, the term "transnational" designates anything that exists outside of a country. The term "nation" refers to an imagined government that occurs within of a certain region and is derived from the Latin word "natio." According to Tölölyan, the idea of the contemporary country is undeniably a creation of the Enlightenment period and has since changed as a result of population spread.

Keywords: *Transnational, identities, fiction, culture, nation.*

INTRODUCTION

A new world that rejects any one sense of homeland, country, borders, or culture was born at the close of the 20th century. After the fall of radical nationalism, we are currently living in a time of globalization and transnationalism. "Pale blue dot (7)," a satellite image captured by American astronomer Carl Sagan in the 1990s, served as the inspiration for the idea of Earth's fragility, finitude, and ecological interdependence. The word "transnationalism" describes the interconnection of nations on a global scale. In this century, it is not simply a political phrase; literature also often uses it. The idea that literature knows no boundaries encourages a connection between literature and transnationalism. Transnational studies, now referred to as writers from industrialized nations have written extensively on the experiences of people leaving their original country in quest of a better life, as have others who have directly experienced migration. As more individuals leave their home nations in search of better opportunities abroad, these studies have gained in significance. A few of the elements influencing migration are postcolonial exodus, conflict, employment, education, tourism, technology, and the expansion of cross-border commerce. Transnationalism has risen in popularity in today's society on par with globalization. Due to the growing interconnectedness of individuals who live outside of national borders, transnationalism is both a study topic and a social practice. Transnationalism is a study program and a social practice because of the growing interconnectedness of individuals living outside of national borders, unlike globalization, where business and non-business organizations generate international effect on business on a worldwide scale. The term "transnationalism" has gained prominence throughout the last century. Following the second phase of post colonialism, a new wave of change called globalization has emerged. The stodgy colonial world seems to have a fresh lease of life thanks to globalization. India fought colonialism for thirty years



before 1947, when the world's circumstances dramatically changed for both India and the rest of the world. People fighting for their ethnicities and cultures came to the realization that in order to advance, they needed to be linked to the rest of the world. Additionally, they believed that there could not exist a pure race or culture due to the fact that colonization changed both the colonised and the colonizer. Migration to industrialized nations for education, a better life, and money has been, and is still being, a widespread occurrence. Although migrants used to feel physically separated from their home nation, the development of technology in the twenty-first century has fundamentally altered the situation. This new outlook is known as transnationalism. Because to transnationalism, migrants now feel more liberated and are able to have a positive impact on the economies and cultures of both their home country and the place they are moving to. A new socioeconomic class that spans country boundaries, cultures, and religion has been created through transnationalism. Experts in transnational studies have shown interest in this newly established society's distinctive characteristic.

TRANSLATOR OF MALADIES

With the liberalization and globalization of society, migration has become an inevitable aspect of contemporary life. Due to commerce, wars, unemployment, job opportunities, poverty, social, and political issues, people are distributed around the world. The migration of individuals from one nation to another has increased globalization's effect. Since immigrants from all over the globe keep in touch with their home nations, transnational links play a significant role in modern globalization. India is said to have the third-largest and most scattered population in the industrialized world. The wonderful thing about the Indian Diaspora is that wherever they go, they carry a little bit of India with them. While they preserve their own culture at home, they are clearly adapted given that they place a higher priority on economic integration than cultural integration. They continue to perpetuate the notion of the return throughout. The popularity of Indian food, movies, yoga, and cultural events has increased all across the globe. The extent of the Indian Diaspora and the degree of Indianization of the globe are shown by the presence of Indian restaurants in cosmopolitan cities. Following the end of World War II, America changed its immigration laws, resulting in large influxes of South Asians and Indians in the 1960s. Due to their contributions to the advancement of both their host and home nations, these Indian Diasporas are recognized as role models for minorities. They have significantly influenced politics, literature, the fine arts, business, industry, science, and technology. Diasporic literature has contributed to South Asians finding a place in their host nations. Due to the fact that it is a novel sort of contact for both the host country and the native nation, it has enhanced both of their experiences. These authors from the diaspora examine the acquisition of new homelands while also lamenting the loss of their own. They connect the reterritorialization and deterritorialization processes. The shift between one's own country and a foreign one, the familiar and the unfamiliar, are all themes explored in diasporic literature. It is the only work of Indian English literature that contrasts these two aspects of living in a native and host country. Additionally, it explores the idea of culture and the difference between fixed and fluid identity. The conversation around each of these ideas eventually brings us to the present definition of the Diaspora, which is flexible enough to exist across East and West, old and modern meanings of migration.

Despite the fact that the name "Diaspora" conjures up ideas of alienation and a lack of roots, the whole global paradigm and definitions have changed and expanded their reach in the era of globalization. Today, "a conquered land that was conquered for the purpose of colonization and assimilation into the empire" might be referred to as being in the diaspora (Bhatt 37). Cultural studies done in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries gave rise to multiculturalism and tolerance for variety since diaspora is no longer connected to emotions like loss, panic, rootlessness, and sadness. The twenty-first century's increasing diaspora gives birth to ideas like transnationalism, which uses terms like hybrids and third space. Authors who depict the experience of migration via fictional characters typically use these phrases. Jhumpa Lahiri's reputation as a diasporic author was cemented with the publication of *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), a collection of nine short stories. She rejects the categorization of either being an American or an Indian since she identifies with both. These traits are also shared by the characters in her writings. The idea of the diasporic experience in diverse ways serves as the foundation for each short story in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Each story centers on persons who have either emigrated to another country or have simultaneously adopted many different national identities. Lahiri has examined such identities in a number of works. This kind of transformation offered both happiness and psychological issues.

Generally speaking, the protagonists juggle two worlds when it comes to cultural identification. The first generation of immigrants gets personal experience with the culture of their own country. Therefore, it seems sense that they would be exposed to their own culture. However, certain traits from their forebears have been passed down to the second generation. They adopt bits of American culture as well as aspects of their own culture that may become part of who they are. As first-generation immigrants navigate through alienation, displacement, and, finally, discovering their ideal fusion of both cultures, the Indian culture plays a significant role in their life. Second-generation immigrants, whose parents may not understand them, have a deep affection for American culture. Additionally, we see the growth of religious transnationalism among Asian American immigrants. Despite the fact that they do not see Christianity as their religion, they acknowledge Christian traditions as being a part of American society. Transnationalism has resulted in a new cultural virtue of religious tolerance and acceptance of Christian traditions for the often conservative first-generation immigrants. The short tales in *Interpreter of Maladies* explore a variety of feelings in people. Two pieces, "A Temporary Matter" and "Mrs. Sen's," tackle the topic of marital conflict and emphasize how immigrant Indian couples must wage a dual battle to adapt to the customs of the foreign place while respecting the spiritual bond of their marriage. The independence and western framework of American society provide a challenge to them. It becomes more challenging to live there with Indian origins and keep the marriage happy over time.

THE NAMESPEAR

One's identity is significantly influenced by geography. Even in the modern day, people still identify with their hometowns and countries of origin. However, the concepts of "home" and "nation" have changed throughout the last century. The terms "nation" and "boundaries" are looked at from a fresh angle in 21st-century literature. In the eighteenth century, colonialism was a global issue. The people's participation in national movements served as their only

justification for being. However, post-colonialism slammed this pious spirit like a ton of bricks since those who battled for the country's integrity were referred to as "nation." The notion of nationalism started to lose its basic meaning in the 1970s due to an increase in international migration. The emergence of post-colonialism has changed how people see boundaries and countries. When people started moving to the major commercial hubs of the globe, they did so for a variety of reasons, and the concept of culture evolved. With the term "post-colonialism," which has long been divisive among those who contest the ineffectiveness of patriotic sentiments, the phrase "hybrid culture" was first used. Ernest Gellner challenges the conventional understanding of nationalism in his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), writing:

The cultural shards and patches that make up nationalism are usually arbitrary historical constructions, thus it is important to remember that nationalism is not what it first seems to be. Any kind of shred would have been enough. This does not, however, mean that nationalism as a concept is in any way arbitrary or accidental. (56)

The idea of culture has developed with the idea of country. Jhumpa Lahiri questions the idea of a fixed identity or linear culture in her writings. She debuted in America in 2003 with the movie *The Namesake*, which is about two generations of Bengali immigrants making a life for themselves in America. *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri explores the diverse perspectives of Asian Americans by drawing on Lahiri's upbringing on the cultural borderland between India and the United States. This book illustrates how immigrants' contributions to American culture have changed throughout time. The backstory of the protagonist's name and its peculiar importance are hinted at in the title. After months of misery and bed rest, Ashoke Ganguli, a young man who was wounded in a railway accident and was almost revived, chooses to leave the city and travel across the globe after being handed a copy of Gogol's "The Overcoat." He goes to America with his wife Ashima. They wait for Ashima's grandmother to give them a suitable name by airmail when they have a newborn son, but the mail never comes. When the boy's grandmother dies away before he is given a name, they give him the nickname Gogol, which finally becomes his name on his school registration. Since Gogol is neither a Bengali nor an American name, it is peculiar. When Gogol gets older, he loses his initial fondness for his moniker and starts to feel ashamed. He can't bear the confusion, the weight, or the boredom. He is happy to finally have a name that makes sense and that no one objects to after officially changing his name to Nikhil. We follow Gogol as he develops, attends an Ivy League university, and works well as an architect. Maxine, an American girl, and he fall in love, but their relationship ends. Finally, he weds a Bengali woman, but the union crumbles. This search causes him to become aware of his cultural difficulties and ancestry.

UNINHABITED EARTH

Global migration has given rise to a fresh set of ideas about what it means to be a citizen of a country and to be a part of a culture. Without the import and export of products, raw resources, and other things, even the most powerful country cannot satisfy all of its needs. Similar to this, no nation can completely fill all of its demands with solely its own people resources. On the other side, people want to carry out original work on their own. Some individuals want academic accomplishment, while others desire professional or artistic

success. The originating country is probably not going to provide them the resources they need to further their objectives. In order to improve oneself, many people often think about moving to countries with more developed resources. The most powerful and developed nations in the world, such as the United States, have embraced this concept of success or advantage since it benefits both the host country and the individual. America is renowned for its diversity, and its strength resides in the fact that it offers opportunity to everyone who crosses its borders. Political, societal, and economic considerations have given the United States a multicultural look. The United States is the nation with the most immigrants in the world because it accepts individuals with all intellectual and physical abilities. America has developed into the most powerful nation in the world in terms of commerce, economics, education, and industry since the end of colonialism and the declaration of independence in 1776. In his well-known essay "Transnational America," Randolph Bourne describes the immigrants who have assimilated into American culture: "We are all foreign-born or the descendants of the foreign-born, and if distinctions are to be made between us, they should rightly be on some other ground than indigenoussness" (252). Randolph Bourne's "Lines for America" are groundbreaking. These opinions help immigrants in America to distinguish themselves. The perspective of many ethnic groups in the United States has been permanently changed by Randolph Bourne and other avant-garde authors of the 20th century. The history and present of the United States are inextricably linked by the works of South Asian authors, particularly those from India. Another writer who claims she is neither American nor Indian is Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri, like many others, is a prime example of a transnational writer who defies cultural or national boundaries. Lahiri's journey from England to America, which started with Indian origins, has terminated in Rome when she wed renowned Latin American journalist Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush. After *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* gained success, Lahiri released *Unaccustomed Earth* in 2008. The short tales in *Unaccustomed Earth* are about immigrants who are looking for their cultural identity in a foreign country. Many characters in these tales express the anguish of trying to find one's identity in a place where one does not really belong. The title alone is intriguing, inspiring the reader to put themselves in the position of immigrants who enter a foreign country convinced that this is not their home yet go on with their lives nevertheless.

Unaccustomed Earth is Jhumpa Lahiri's second book of short tales. The eight tales focus on the lives of Bengali American families and are situated in diverse parts of the globe. There are two sections to this collection of short tales. In the first part, there are five short stories: "Unaccustomed Earth," "A Choice of Accommodation," "HellHeaven," "Only Goodness," and "Nobody's Business," while the second section is a trilogy on Hema and Kaushik's horrific story. The *Scarlet Letter's* prologue by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which argues that a person could benefit by relocating if they set down roots in a new environment, is where the term comes from. For first-generation immigrants, settling in a foreign country requires a significant effort that is marked by anxiety, conflicts, troublesome emotions, the loss of one's own tradition, and the acquisition of a new culture. Themes in these tales include the interconnectedness of generations, fidelity to one's home culture and, on occasion, its betrayal due to external circumstances, identity loss and reinvention. First-generation migrants take a long time to adapt to the new culture and start a

new life since they are unfamiliar to the foreign environment. Second-generation immigrants, their children go off on their own journeys in pursuit of their own identities.

A LOWLANDS

In post-independence India, the globalization phenomenon has marked a turning point not only in the history of the country but also of the whole globe. The juvenile country, which has lately felt the impact of Western powers and now has access to Western marvels owing to its exposure to technology, is being shaped by the currents of instability that are sweeping the earth. There is a feeling of belonging to the culture and echoes of the country's history at this particular juncture in India's evolution into a new nation. India is simultaneously working to forge a daring course for its development. The Lowland, a 2013 publication by Jhumpa Lahiri, made an effort to embody this attitude. The Lowland is a story about a wide range of individuals with a wide range of identities. The book narrates the tale of two brothers, Udayan and Subhash, who follow conflicting lifestyles and are defined by each other, making us rethink the idea of "identity." They have characteristics that both unite and separate their interwoven identities. A low-lying location close to their house that floods during the monsoon bears the name of the brothers and serves as a silent reminder of their turbulent lives. At the 2014 Jaipur Literary Festival, Lahiri asserted the significance of Bengal in her life even if she rejects any literary labels. She goes on to say about Kolkata, "The impact that the absence of a place can have on a person is an inherent part of my existence." A world without it is unimaginable to me (India Today 2014). Lahiri also revealed to the audience at the Jaipur Literature Festival that a trip to Kolkata had tormented her much and placed the story of The Lowland in front of her. She made the decision to write about it. Because Bengalis have suffered significantly as a consequence of the Naxalite movement, other Bengali authors have also created fictional works about it. The Lowland features Gauri, a shrewd woman trapped between fate's whims and her connections to two brothers. The story follows them over the course of sixty years, tracking not just their individual highs and lows but also those of a nation on the verge of change. These identities come from a variety of Asian American cultures. The bulk of the work is set in America, where it features a variety of characters, historical events, socioeconomic situations, political figures, and the intellectual community, even though it starts in South Calcutta. Lahiri has created a collage of these interconnected people and occasions to depict the global context of the south Asian community. The two brothers' boyhood in Calcutta is vividly described in the first few chapters of the book. Two brothers from Calcutta, Udayan and Subhash, were raised in the dirty Tollygunge neighborhood, which stands in stark contrast to the Tollygunge club nearby. The brothers are intrigued to take a look inside since they are aware of an elite group that leads a life that is superior than their own but they are not allowed to join. Their first interaction with the colonial world, which would influence the rest of their lives, occurs here. Access to the club is limited, and vast tracts of land are walled off for the pleasure of a select few, despite the British having left India.

In terms of chronology, culture, and colonization, the Tollygunge club and the Tollygunge community reflect two unique identities. Nine kilometers outside the city's core, in the southern region of Kolkata, is where you'll find the Tollygunge Club. The Club was started in 1895. It has developed into a hub for networking among British businessmen and bankers.

The purpose of establishing the club was to provide police officers who were escaping oppressive cities a place to call home in an unfamiliar setting. British officers craved for the conveniences of home since India was such an alien environment to them. It is the first club of its sort from that time period, and as such, it performs better than its rivals. The club began as an equestrian organization with a specific collection of flora and fauna, with a primary concentration on riding and all equestrian sports. It has every amenity that is hardly encountered in one place. 'Tolly,' as it has affectionately come to be called, is unparalleled in India, if not the whole globe, in these and many other respects. In the 18th century, Tollygunge was known as Rasa Pagla. It was a rainforest with a few scattered European garden homes. European officers who had previously lived in cities were drawn to the lovely houses in little communities apart from the craziness of the city. Colonel William Tolly opened the Adi Ganga River to navigation in 1774. This Rasa pagla was given the name Tolly in honor of the Colonel. In the nineteenth century, the British started supporting Tollygunge Club and Tollygunge Golf Club. The region quickly developed into a thriving suburban area. There, the uniformed class earned a livelihood, and conditions were basic and innocent. The arrival of Tolly Club in Kolkata is representative of a world that was previously unknown to Indians. It also serves as a metaphor for the unintentional mingling of civilizations on the Indian subcontinent before the advent of the current globalization culture.

CONCLUSION

Transnationalism, we might say, is a phrase that describes the interconnection of nations all over the globe. The term "transnational studies" is now used frequently in literature as well as politics to describe the experiences of people leaving their home countries in search of better lives. Both writers from industrialized nations and people who have personally experienced migration have written extensively on this subject. As more individuals move away from their home nations in search of better opportunities, the importance of these studies has increased. Interpreter of *Maladies* (1999), a collection of nine short stories, established Jhumpa Lahiri as a diasporic literary personality. She rejects the categorization of either being an American or an Indian since she identifies with both. Jhumpa Lahiri is another novelist who has said that she is neither American nor Indian. Characters in her books also exhibit similar traits. Lahiri, like many others, is a prime example of a transnational writer who defies cultural or national boundaries.

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