

TRANSNATIONALISM, DIASPORA: SOUTH ASIAN
WOMEN WRITERS

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Over the past decades, the concept of diaspora and Transnationalism have served as prominent research lenses through which one can view the aftermath of international migration and shifting of state borders across populations. Impact of mobile culture, technology and Globalization on human life and globe is incalculable today. Globalization and technology have make borders fluid, porous and volatile. There has been a rapid increase of migration across the world since 1989. Because of the multiple and shifting identities of immigrants, the increasing transnationalization of cultural production, distribution, consumption and the fundamental transformation in the political economy of capitalism of late twentieth century, it is no longer enough to analyze the complexity of cultural production, distribution and consumption by using a binary model of the world system such as global, local, center – periphery. These binary models may erase the existence of multiple expressions of local identities and resistances.

The term transnational is very relevant term which helps us to question any homogenous and monolithic construction of local and global culture and identities. Most important, the term transnational can be applied along with the critiques offered by post-colonial and post –colonial diaspora studies which interrogates the notion of unified and static national and cultural identity. Diaspora is not new; it has its roots in history and religion. Diaspora is an old

concept whose uses and meanings have undergone dramatic change. Older notion of Diaspora refers to forced dispersal and this is rooted in the experience of Jews, but also more recently of Palestinians. Newer notions of Diaspora often refer to any kind of dispersal. Older notion of Diaspora implied that its members do not fully integrate socially, economically, culturally into country of settlement. This notion of Diaspora is often associated with boundary maintenance by a dominant majority through discrimination against Diaspora groups. Newer notions of Diaspora emphasize cultural hybridity in the wake of dissemination which owes something to the wit and wisdom of Jacques Derrida.

South Asia is a geographical denotation of seven countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – as well as a political construct. The South Asian Women Writers either write from within or without South Asia. They cannot be supposed to fall into such neat and sharply defined compartments. Many South Asians travel widely, frequently and for extended period of time. Many reside both in South Asia and in the West, having family and bases in both locations and thus moving freely and frequently from one to the other country. They have immigrated to US, UK, Canada and Australia. Some hold dual citizenship while others have permanent residence status in countries outside their own. This travel and mobility now blurs the boundary between the home and diasporic writers. This suggests that these very boundary markers are negotiable, and certainly questionable. Nationality now has become an ambivalent construct. Diasporic South Asian Women Writers are inclined to define themselves as based on race, culture, and family background rather than on nationality and political status.

When discussing home in South Asia, it becomes clear that most Diasporic South Asian authors have a specific location in mind. Their conscious or subconscious definition 'home' seldom includes or embraces an entire country. For some it is particular state. For e.g. Kerala or Punjab or Tamil Nadu. For others it is particular city – Delhi, Calcutta, Kandy, Lahore etc. in fact home is not always geographical location. In Salman Rushdie's word it is 'Imagined

Homeland' (1991).

The term Diaspora can be used as theoretical framework to critique the concept of pure and fixed home, place, and notion. South Asian Women Writers used the diaspora to interrogate the hegemonic nationalist construction of home, space, and cultural and national identity. The Diasporic South Asian Women Writers are the product of two cultures. They are unsure of their status related to mainstream and also in relation to their minority group.

Manju Jaidka writes about the empowerment of these women writers:

“Grappling with the problem of defining their identities, the self they depict is confused one, sometimes central and sometimes marginalize other, although their effort is to move from margin to center. Such a move may lead to an empowerment of themselves. (2000).

Though, these women writers live on the peripheries of the mainstream culture, they provide empowered space that promises to create new subjectivities, new identities in us. Homi Bhabha writes about this ‘in-between’ space in his essay, “dissemination: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation:”

“The boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the Western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal liminality that proves a place from which to speak both of and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent. (1994)

It is this ‘in-between’ space which has turned in a advantages and which has given leading women writers of the South Asia such as, Bharti Mukharjee, Kiran Narayan, Chitra Banerjee, Nikki Haley, Meena Alexander and Bapsi Sidhwa. These women writers describe multiple patterns of diasporic movement motivated by different factors: interracial marriages, mobile parents, job, higher education, war, famine, human trafficking. These writers use gender and sexuality as sites of diasporic negotiations in interrogating racist,

nationalist and traditional discourses enclosing them. Women studies particularly Diasporic South Asian Women Writing is a good area of research and teaching today. A lot has been written about rural women in regional literature but it is high time to know about women who migrate within country or outside the country as 50% of the migrants are women today. These women writers are trying to reidentify migrant women across the world. What is significant about these writers is that along with the domestic problems they write about contemporary history, international politics. Chitra Bajerjee writes about national tragedy 9/11 in her novel 'Queen of Dreams' (2004). Chitra Banerjee reinterprets the Ancient Indian Myths and epics and makes them blend with the story of immigrant Indian women struggling to assimilate in an alien culture. Bapsi Sidhwa in her recent interview after 9/11 openly discussed about paradoxes of American policies. In her novel 'An American Brat' (1993) she commented America though paradoxical:

“was shaping a new world, the future in microcosm, the melting pot in which every race and creed was being increasingly represented, compelled to live with and tolerate the ‘other’.” (AB - 303)

The Governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley writes in her book *Can't Is Not an Option (My American Story)* (2012), the way Randhawas faced ignorance, prejudice and sometimes blatant hostility. Nikki watched struggle of parent with government bureaucracy and overregulation. Her frustration inspired her to get into politics and run for the state legislature. That first campaign against an entrenched incumbent, led to racial and religious slurs and threats- but Haley, like her parents, refused to go back down. In the same state where her family was once ridiculed, she inspired a diverse grassroots following. In November 2010 she was elected South Carolina's first female governor and first nonwhite governor, and only the second Indian American governor in the country. Her volunteer defend the racist criticism “they are more American than you could ever dream of being! Isn't it something that a person whose parents are from another country can portray America better than you and I

can? They can teach us a lesson of what it means to be an American.”

These South Asian Women Writers have aptly captured the way diaspora have affinity with various countries they belong. As they belong to various countries. Their patriotism is not confined to one country. Transnationalism is the process of deterritorialization. As diaspora communities transcend geographical and political territory they do not need nation/alism. They are citizen of a global/transnational world. They have multiple consciousnesses. These floating citizens are changing the history of modern nation.

Earnest Renan in his essay “What is nation?” tries to define nation:

“man is slave neither of his race, nor his language, nor his religion, nor of course of rivers, nor of the direction taken by mountain chain. A large aggregate of men, health in mind and warm of heart, creates a kind of moral conscience which we call nation. (Bhabha 1994).

Renan believes that uniformity and homogeneousness of nation is myth. Nation is always and will remain ambivalent. Transnational and post-colonial feminist theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Lata Moni deconstruct the Eurocentric hegemonic and monolithic construction of ‘Third World’. women who erase the multiple experience and differences of women in relation to gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality. The transnational technological networks enable women to set up close linkages with their homeland. This is the age of ‘in-betweeners’. In course of time, diasporic individuals from the same country form communities and different diaspora communities make “composite communities”. Thus transnational communities are formed. According to Robin Cohen the distinct diaspora communities are constructed out of

“the confluence of narratives of the old country to the new, which creates a sense of shared history”. (Cohen – 1997)

What is significant about these women writers is that they historicize their existence in today's world without dismissing the impact of Colonialism or understanding the threat of neocolonial projects. These writers approach, attitude and treatment of history are different from of men. Their concerns are humanitarians which is essential today, because fundamentalism is emerging vigorously in entire world. The literature of South Asian Women Writers constitutes a reasonable ground for interdisciplinary relevance.

My paper focuses on South Asian Women Writers because I believe women are the real minority across the world irrespective of caste, religion and nationality.

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