

Beyond Boundaries: Transnational Identity in Contemporary Indian Literature

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 12.11.2024

Accepted: 17.12.2024

Published: 20.12.2024

Citation:

Udhayakumar, S. "Beyond Boundaries: Transnational Identity in Contemporary Indian Literature." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2024, pp. 143-146.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v13iS1-Dec.8570>

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Abstract

The predominant notion of Contemporary Indian literature is to explore the profound analysis of identity in the perceptions of displacement narratives, cultural negotiation, and personal transformation. In Salman Rushdie's Midnight Children and Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake are considered pioneering novels that elucidate the complexity of transnational experiences, whose individual identities are continuously transferred across geographical and emotional boundaries.

Characters reflect the essential postcolonial figure – constantly caught between different cultural environments, questioning traditional ideas of indigenism. The struggle and exploration of the characters Saleem Sinai and Gogol Ganguli are greater than the protagonists; their diasporic consciousness and their lives represent the intertwined between their self-efficiency and collective consciousness, metaphorically personified with the thematic frameworks.

The vital inquisition of identity as a variable and vibrant concepts are evident in Rushdie's magical realism and Lahiri's nuanced psychological observation. These novels appropriately exhibited the transnational experiences which are not merely connected with geographical alteration but also connected with psychological quest of self-realization. The complicated practice of cultural hybridization is depicted in the struggle of the characters where these personal narratives interconnect with inclusive notions of historical and migratory experiences. Thus, personal narratives effectively project the way of how contemporary Indian literature goes beyond the representation of ordinary things, becoming a crucial part where different cultures interact and come to terms with each other. By exposing on these central characters, the novels demonstrate how the limits of national boundaries are not solid and unchanging. Rushdie and Lahiri frames a concreating narratives that encounter monolithic understandings of cultural identity by intersecting personal experience with the wide spread socio-political backdrops. Their novels highlight the cross national borders can intensely change people. And they expressed that being displaced opens a new path of thinking about self and communal.

Keywords: Personal Narratives, Collective Consciousness, Cultural Hybridization, Self-Realization

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* the protagonist born at the right moment of India's independence on August 15, 1947. The protagonist Saleem Sinai is misplaced with another new born baby boy, Shiva, by Mary Pereira, a nurse. Saleem nurtured in a wealthy family whereas Shiva nurtured in a poor family. Saleem makes a journey in order to escape from the chaos prevailed during the period of emergency and to seek his original identity as a 'Midnight Child' whom all have the special powers. In search of his own identity he understands his position in India's history. The misplaced children, Saleem and Shiva, reunited through this comes to know of his identity. Homi Bhabha, one of the great Indian Philosophers states "Rushdie's novel is a powerful exploration of the transnational identity of India, caught between the colonial past and the postcolonial present." (Bhabha 147).

“I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world.” (Rushdie)

This expression exposes the birth of Saleem at midnight on August 15, 1947 that corresponds with the independence of India. The significance of the moment is highlighted by the applicable of magical realism, as noticed in the 'clock-hands joined palms'. The hybrid nature of nation reflects in Saleem's narration mixed up with Indian and British cultural influences that shows his hybrid identity.

“You were, however, correctly identifies, ‘Padma cries, ‘as the true heir of the Sinai fortune!’” (Rushdie)

The complications of identity and belonging are emphasized in the conversation of Saleem and Padma. The misplacement of the infant babies also arise inquisition about his own identity and heritage. This novel *Midnight's Children* analyzes the idea of a stable identity rather than highlighting the uncertainty and variability of self-experience.

“India, the new myth – a myth that, for its own sake, had to create an enemy, the Other, and to make of it a myth as well.” (Rushdie 167)

This expression emphasized the exploration of post-colonial identity of India in the novel. The utilization of 'enemy' or 'Other' imitates the confusion between national identities and cultural difference. Hitherto, the novel analyzes the idea of a steady identity of nation, rather than highlighting the multiplicity and individualism of Indian experiences. Edward Said, one of the Palestinian-American scholars shields that “Rushdie's novel shows how transnational identity is shaped by the intersections of history, culture, and politics.” (Said 231).

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* also deals with the transnational identity through the character Ganguli whose family is migrated from Calcutta to New York City during 1970s. The family strived hard to equalize their Indian cultural customs with their new American lifestyle. Their son, Gogol, born in America and completely unaware of the Indian tradition, feels like sandwich between his American Identity and his parent's cultural traditions. His name comes from the renowned Russian author Nikolai Gogol, whom his father most admired. He changed his name to Nikhil when he grows up and tries to move away from the Indian tradition that creates trouble in his family. At the same time, the emotional imbalance of the family is supplementary fueled by his father, Ashoke's tragic past, and Ashima's homesickness for India. During the journey of Gogol, the novel prominently discovers the complications of the immigrant experience and also the motif of transnational identity, belonging and cultural heritage.

“As a child, Gogol had struggled to pronounce his name... He had wanted to be called something else, something that didn't require a complicated explanation...” (Lahiri 28)

The above mentioned line emphasizes the rivalry of Gogol with his transnational identity, sandwiched between his American lifestyle and his Cultural heritage of India.

“I am tired of being a foreigner, Ashima said... I am tired of not belonging.” (Lahiri 49)

The above statement of Ashima replicates the struggle of crossing numerous cultural identities and desire for a sense of belonging.

“For years I lived in the hybrid world of my parents' memories and my won reality...” (Lahiri 276)

The complications of growing up between cultures are underlined by the reflection of Gogol on his hybrid identity.

In contemporary literature, the transnational identity of a common individual due to the transformation or the development of socio political condition is extremely deciphered through the characters of Saleem in Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and Ganguli in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, highlighting the personal experiences who exceed beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. Along with the discussion of multiple cultural identities, the two novels lighten up the complicated psychological aspects of characters.

Both Saleem Sinai and Gogol Ganguli are the representation of pivotal of transnational identity. Their lifestyle are the curtail illustration of intertwined between their personal identity and collective cultural consciousness. The birth of Saleem is marked and connected with the Independence of India which signified the personal narrative and national narrative whereas Gogol's identity with his name deals with the compromise of his own culture and the culture belong his lifestyle.

The postcolonial theorists defined the protagonists' embodiment as cultural hybridity. Thus the journey of Saleem through the historical backdrop with magical realism and the sandwich condition of Gogol between Indian tradition and American identity exposes individuality as ever flowing and dynamic concept. The characters encounter the massive understandings of cultural consciousness, depicting the complicated and multilayered individualism spawned by transnational experience.

The emotional statement of Ashima, "I am tired of not belonging," (Jhumpa Lahiri 49) the poignant core of transnational experience is condensed in this statement. The psychological complication of migration is illumined through the struggle of the characters. Here identity more than a fixed formation promotes the constant process of mediation.

The blend of magical realism in Rushdie's novel and the in-depth psychological exploration of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel involved deeply with the question of identity. The changeability of national boundaries, depicting displacement as a procreative ground for rethinking individual and community are portrayed by them. These novels expanded the experience of individual, serving as important platforms for cultural transformation. These novels picturized that how contemporary Indian literature portrays the complex interplay between personal assist and collective historical narratives, protesting customary ideas of devotedness and national identity. Rushdie and Lahiri craft fascinating narratives with the intertwining personal experiences with wide sensed socio-political contexts, that highlights the transformative possibility of transnational experiences, projecting identity as a constant, and evolving journey.

Conclusion

Contemporary Indian literature, through the distinct works of Salman Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri offer a deep and complex exploration of identity that transcends traditional geographical and cultural boundaries. These narratives reveal identity not as a static construct, but as a dynamic and ever-evolving process of negotiation and self-discovery. In *Midnight's Children* and *The Namesake*, the protagonists Saleem Sinai and Gogol Ganguli emerge as powerful metaphors for the transnational experience. Their lives symbolize the complex psychological landscape of individuals navigating multiple cultural identities, perpetually suspended between inherited traditions and personal aspirations. Rushdie's magical realism and Lahiri's nuanced psychological exploration converge on their fundamental question of identity, demonstrating how displacement becomes a generative space for the reinvention of self and community. The emotional core of these stories lies in the characters' deep struggle for belonging. Ashima's poignant statement that she is 'tired of not belonging' encapsulates the universal experience of transnational subjects who find themselves constantly negotiating cultural landscape. These stories reveal that identity is not just about geographical location, but also about complex psychological journeys toward understanding and accepting the multifaceted self. By weaving personal stories with broader sociopolitical contexts, these novels challenge monolithic concepts of cultural identity. They expose the porosity of national borders and show how individual experiences intersect with collective historical narratives. The protagonists' journeys highlight the transformative potential of transnational experiences, presenting identity as an ongoing process of becoming rather than a fixed unchanging state. Ultimately, these narratives transcend individual stories to become crucial sites of cultural negotiation. They offer profound insights into the human capacity for adaptation, resilience, and self-invention. Contemporary Indian literature, through these powerful works, invites readers to understand identity as a complex and fluid construct – a delicate dance between personal agency and collective memory that reflects the increasingly interconnected nature of our global experience.

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