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The Politics of Home and Belonging in Contemporary South Asian Diasporic Narratives

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Abstract : Using transnational settings as a lens, this research analyzes how South Asian diasporic narratives of the present day navigate the politics of home, belonging, and identity. The study examines literary works that deal with themes of cultural displacement, generational gaps, racialized experiences, and the emotional conflicts that arise from migration and remembrance. This piece delves into the ways in which authors use narrative techniques like fragmented storytelling, nostalgic memories, multilingual expression, and spatial symbolism to challenge rigid ideas of "home" and show how belonging is subject to constant change. Gender, class, nationalism, and cultural hybridity are just a few of the power dynamics illuminated by the study's examination of postcolonial, feminist, and intersectional frameworks as they pertain to diaspora. In the end, this study contends that modern South Asian diasporic literature reimagines home as an ever-changing emotional and psychological terrain impacted by grief, longing, strength, and inventive rethinking, rather than a fixed location.

Keywords: South Asian diaspora, belonging, home, cultural identity, migration, nostalgia, postcolonial studies, hybridity, displacement, transnational narratives

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of diaspora is the idea of a distant home, both in terms of physical location and in terms of time. Diasporans' homes are the places of origin where they first encountered each other and where they began to build their identities. While some argue that scholars should not use the terms "home" or "homeland" when evaluating diaspora communities, the importance of home and land in the concept's inception and evolution remains enormously potent. The diasporic awareness of the first, second, or third generation of migrants, as well as the memory of the first generation, create this picture of the original home. The concept of home is conceptualized from one's memories and awareness, which are firmly grounded in one's country. Consequently, a home is more than just a physical location; it is a concept infused with subjective experiences and ideas. The 'homeland' that diasporas imagine is where they reside. Furthermore, they identify more with the past than with the present (Rushdie 1991). Both ties to one's home and the experience of being at home are part of one's memory. What

this means is that the act of remembering is foundational to migrants' sense of home and belonging, as are recollections of the past.

Cultural systems of meaning include a sense of location and space when thinking about diasporic societies. Cultures are often depicted as being "placed" or influenced by landscapes, even if this is only in our minds (Hall 1995). The idea here is to seep across space and time until one reaches the "homeland" that preserves the "fundamentals" of one's culture and identity. However, one must recognize that the concept of identity may have several interpretations depending on the context in which one finds themselves in order to use it as an analytical tool. This study aims to investigate 'home' in various contexts, including but not limited to: land(scape) and belonging, immigrant emotional and intellectual reactions, ethnic identification, generational bonds, affective memory, and modern multidimensional identity traits. The South Asian diaspora is the focus of all these interconnected notions. Understanding the significance of home, homeland, memory, and repeated displacements in the lives of migrants seems inevitable, which is why these many notions are considered. Diasporic identity cannot be defined in isolation, regardless of generational disparities. Poets from South Asian diasporas who imaginatively reimagine their origin provide a window into the dynamic process of identity transition that this article seeks to illuminate. The diaspora of South Asian writers is particularly well-known for the widespread dissemination of their fictional works. These books and works of prose also became well-known among academic readers. Salman Rushdie, Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Michael Ondaatje, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Moksha Seth, Attia Hossain, and Vikram Seth are only a few of the well-known writers from the South Asian diaspora. Because of this, studies of South Asian literatures almost never include poetry as a genre. Critical works on poets from South Asia in diaspora are few and few between, and they notably exclude poets from Pakistan and Bangladesh, two of the most populous countries in South Asia. These claims call for research into the works of lesser-known South Asian diasporic poets, in addition to the canonized works of Indian diasporic poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Saleem Peeradina, Sujata Bhatt, Meena Alexander, Uma Parameswaran, and others.

Consequently, we have chosen six poets from the South Asian diaspora—Dilruba Ahmed of Bangladesh and Rienzi Crusz of Sri Lanka—to delve into the complexities of identity among the varied South Asian migrant population. These poets hail from Pakistan (Moniza Alvi and Tariq Latif) and India (Meena Alexander and Shanta Acharya). The United Kingdom and North America are the permanent homes of all these poets. A selection of their outstanding

poetry collections is examined in this study, which includes the works of Alexander (2008), Acharya (2010), Alvi (2008), Latif (2007), Ahmed (2011), Crusz (2009), and Ahmed's Dhaka Dust (2011). The selection of works for the paper is particularly marked by their publication in the twenty-first century. In light of the changing global order brought about by rapid developments in communication and technology, economic liberalism, and cross-border geopolitics, this chronology is crucial for understanding how diasporic communities in the host country have been impacted. Space, time, connection, travel, sojourn, and belonging have all been thrust upon us in this first decade of the century. Technologies, discursive interests, and socioeconomic linkages all play a role in creating the schema of things that people, culture, and objects move inside. This schema determines how they are attached or detached. In the context of the aforementioned claims, such pursuits inevitably lead to discussions on "identity," a word fraught with conceptual complexities.

Poems from the South Asian diaspora are located at a global crossroads, where many cultures clash and merge to create new homes along the diasporic migration line. As a result of mobilities, one is forced to reconsider identitarian issues pertaining to one's home, one's memory of it, the landscape, and one's rituals. Along with people, cultures also migrate, which may lead to a reimagining of what it means to be "home" and a resuscitation of politics centered on national pride. After deterritorialization, the use of space, location, and land helps people remember their earliest cultural reference point. Therefore, in these liminal areas connected to several cultural realms, the concept of home has to be rethought. Instead of being in a static cultural or national context, the concept of home is best understood as being embedded in a complex network of real and imagined social, economic, and cultural ties. Despite the constant back-and-forth between homeland and hostland, the concept of "home" continues to play a key role in diasporic identity. Therefore, in order to acknowledge the influence of mobilities, cultural dialogues, and in-betweenness on the overall notions of home, memory, and identity, the following arguments examine, at a triadic level, the poetic sensibility of South Asian diaspora litterateurs. First, there are insights into the importance of home and land in shaping migrant identities. Second, we see how migrant memories can keep this attachment to the original home alive. Third, we take a look at the theory and practice of identity transitions to understand the South Asian diasporic consciousness in the face of the ever-changing social, cultural, political, and economic conditions that migrant populations face today. Scholars have long sought to compartmentalize different aspects of diasporic belonging, despite the fact that arguments about diasporic identity forms often occur. Unlike

their modern-day counterparts, South Asian diasporas are multilateral, hybrid, and, in many instances, cosmopolitan voluntary migrants; in contrast, they were formerly static, unilateral groups that endured forcible expulsion under colonialism. The central focus of this research is to use poetry texts from the South Asian diaspora to understand how the lives of migrants in the hostland have changed over time. This research aims to contextualize chosen poems from the given collections and explain them in relation to important ideas for a more precise textual analysis.

Home(land) and Diasporic Identity

Many South Asians who now reside outside of their ancestral country may trace their ancestry back to that place and the people who lived there. A community's cultural identity may become even more convoluted as a result of the complexities brought up by displacement. So, cultural identity is always being constructed via recollection, imagination, story, and myth rather than stating an unquestioned, factual history. "There is always a politics of identity, a politics of position" (Hall 1990, 226) since cultural identities rely on identification notes seen as a "positioning" within cultural and historical discourses. Each diaspora site has its own unique history, and this history dictates where the topic stands. Nevertheless, in this age with highly developed information and transportation networks, the needs of location politics are already complicated. It establishes accountability to many locations for an identity. With temporary visits to the origin, technology makes it easy to stay linked to the "lost" home, bridging the gap between "here" and "there" (the homeland and hostland). However, this does nothing to alleviate the severity of the root loss. Instead, the idea of complex multiple rootedness is strengthened by the moves and diversions, which happen regardless of geographical borders, wherever cultural identifications take place.

The diaspora notion is defined by the shelter, residence, dwelling of motherland. Without consulting the idea of diaspora's origins, connotations, and development, some academics dismantle the home/homeland dichotomy. Among those who have voiced concerns about what amounts to "maintenance or restoration" of a homeland and advocated for its actual construction is Robin Cohen (1997). His position is that we need to go back to William Safran's six defining features of diasporas. So, according to his argument, "the case of a 'imagined homeland' that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way" would be covered in the process of creating a homeland (1997, 23). "Homeland" was built in the past. On the other hand, Avtar Brah's Cartographies of Diaspora

(1996) takes a strong stance in distancing diaspora from country. When she thinks about diaspora, she says, "offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire." This makes home seem less concrete and more abstract. Still, a "homeland" want and a homing desire are distinct concepts (194). For her, "home" is more than just a geographical location to which migrants want to return. Having said that, not every diaspora has any want to go back to their homeland. For certain South Asian migrant groups in Trinidad, maintaining cultural ties to their home on the Indian subcontinent may have greater significance than returning to their homeland, as she explains. In the diasporic imagination, the 'homing urge' persists even in the absence of physical access to the motherland. Thus, the house becomes a homing yearning and a space devoid of a sense of place. According to Brah:

> *Have you ever wondered where home is? First, for those living in diaspora, "home" is a fantastical, idealized concept. Even while it is feasible to go to the physical location associated with the term "place of origin," this is nonetheless a place from which no one can ever return. The lived experience of a place is another definition of home. Through the historically particular daily of social connections, we experience its noises, odors, heat, dust, lovely summer nights, the thrill of the first snowfall, chilly winter evenings, gloomy gray sky midday, and so on. (188–89),*

According to these readings, the physical environment of a house might take a back seat to the sentiments, experiences, and routines that come with being a home. Diasporic people's subjective experiences may be multi-placed, but it doesn't mean they're "rootless" or have no connection to their site of settlement. Then, a home is a location where one seeks for its "roots" and discovers its identity—albeit a hyphenated one. With the advent of modern computer-mediated ultra-fast communication systems, the once-lost connection to the source is not only restored, but also maintained in the imagination. Therefore, it is worth noting that Cohen's concept of home is:

> *the place of birth, the place of residence, a local, national, or international location, an imagined virtual community connected, for instance, by the internet, or a matrix of intimate social relationships and familiar experiences (thus fitting the adage that "home is where the heart is"). (119).*

In the context of imagined and virtual environments that link dispersed people beyond physical location, the quote above offers a fresh and adaptable perspective on the idea of home. Cohen places more emphasis on making a house a home than on keeping one. A place like this, his

metaphorical home, may transcend borders and be anywhere, in his view. Having said that, Cohen is not the only one who has elevated the concept of homeland to a global stage. The diasporic home must be meticulously located in the ancestral homeland, according to Khachig Tölölyan. “Exilic nationalism” is losing ground to “diasporic transnationalism" among today’s youth. The location where new immigrants still feel most at home is the transnational social space, and they attribute this quality of modern forms of dispersion to diasporas, according to Tölölyan (2012, 11). The second and third generations of immigrants continue to live in more than one country, bridging the gap between their ancestral homeland and the modern world, all the while keeping in touch with loved ones back home and hoping for the best for their ancestral homeland. The need for harmony and cohesion permeates every imagined society, whether it a nation-state or a region. As the world's geopolitical, social, and technical landscapes change, the notion of diaspora evolves, yet these concepts imply that the homeland is its base.

Poetry written on a topic from the host country frequently makes the reader feel a sense of territorial belonging. Poets from the South Asian diaspora share this trait. At the forefront is the idea of the "land" and "home" becoming one. The loss of one's homeland—representing one's cultural, emotional, linguistic, social, political, geographical, and economic necessities—can lead to a profound feeling of dispossession for those experiencing diaspora. Deterritorialization refers to the "loss of the 'natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories" (Canclini 1995, 229). Both the literal "home" and the more abstract "homeland" have a role in shaping migrant identities, and both are discussed here. In contrast to the latter, the former does not insist on a direct physical link to the source. There is a tangible one and an abstract one. If "home" refers to an internal experience, then "homeland" refers to an external location. Both concepts have developed from their traditional, orthodox, and steady origins in today's technologically advanced, internationally interconnected society. While the diasporic imagination and cultural distinctiveness can serve as technological conduits for the symbolic home (e.g., photos, videos, live broadcast), the internet and other forms of modern transportation make it possible to swiftly and easily access the geopolitical homeland. The "land/territory" and the "home" both house the diasporic identity. Diaspora poets from South Asia, like Orissa-born Indian Shanta Acharya, evidently find ways to communicate the concept of home (country) in their poetry. She expertly depicts the 'dispossession' of land in order to question the lifestyles of migrants. She thinks of the traditional Jewish idea of a "promised land" and the journey there that is expected. "Dispossessed" is a poem on homelessness and

its omnipresence from Dreams that Spell the Light (2010). Those fleeing persecution are the narrators of this poem. They are prepared to give up everything—even their children and future—in exchange for a safe haven. The predicament of such deterritorialized entities is astutely articulated by Acharya:

> *As sincere Christians, unwavering in our faith, and dreaming of putting our confidence in an adopted nation, we set out on this voyage to the promised land across the perilous seas, believing that life would no longer be cheap or readily stolen: (2010, 30)*

After going through many migrations herself, the poet knows that even a homecoming can't guarantee the "faith" that everything would be well. In 1985, Acharya joined the asset management profession in London after leaving India to pursue a PhD at Oxford. She worked as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University's Department of English and American Literature and Languages before moving into asset management. Coming from an Indian background, she understands the challenges of adjusting to other environments. The importance of one's country to one's identity, nationalism, emotions, and fantasies is something she concedes.

Deterritorialization, which results in the loss of land or home and the familiar environment, affects her sensibilities as a poet. In the poem up there, we get a picture of a group of refugees making their way to a place where they hope to find a better life, where they hope that their existence would have more meaning. But they are left high and dry without any possessions. Forced immigrants bring more suffering to the so-called "adopted homeland" by clinging to the optimism they left behind. Because of everything they've been through, the refugee group is understandably fearful of what the future holds. The poet thus expresses a strong yearning for a homeland whose absence follows one even after migration. The existentially invested homeland and the hostland's role in identity negotiation are called into question by the crises that these people endure. A state of spiritual anguish and disintegration brought on by dispersion is symbolized in the poem. 'Promised land' here alludes to the unfortunate Jews who were sent out of the biblical country of Israel by a furious God. In light of the Jewish people's plight and the loss of their "homeland," other dispersed groups from all over the world began to use the term "diaspora" to characterize their own relocation and hardship.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate how, in current South Asian diasporic narratives, Divakaruni and Patil embody the politics of home, belonging, and gay desire.

2. To examine how gay South Asian people express alternate kinds of belonging via metaphors, images, and visual aesthetics (such as landscapes and linework).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Dispersing the Queer in Divakaruni and Patil

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni opens "The Blooming Season for Cacti" by depicting Mira's journey to California, the quintessential diaspora, which in the text's universe is only reachable across a desert with "[b]rown land, brown sky, hills like brown \breasts" (167). In addition to bringing to mind Mira's brown body and the implicitly brown South-Asian reality that characterizes her hybrid existence in this white setting, these allusions ("[b]rown land, brown sky") also more precisely foreshadow her queer desire ("hills like brown breasts") and the queer diaspora, which becomes increasingly clear as we continue reading (167). Mira's observation that the "sand rippled into a thousand lines of cursive" creating "a dangerous alphabet" (168) is a clear example of the subversion reflected in the opening sections by this South Asian queer diaspora already in the making. The swirly cursive is reminiscent of Amruta Patil's paintings in Kari, where the transition from distinct straight lines to a mess of swirly ones pictorially captures every introduction into the realm of queer desire and every suggestion of homosexual sexuality. The scene when Kari reflects on her own romance with Ruth best illustrates this. Kari presents this as a traditional movie story, depicting their first encounter at a train station.

A noticeboard featuring stills from the heteronormative mainstream cult classic, Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge, serves as the backdrop for their first meeting. This institutionalizes the conventional love story in the novel's world while also highlighting the transgressive departure indicated by Kari and Ruth's romance (68). Subsequently, the following page consists of three top-to-bottom parallel panels that illustrate the development of the love narrative. Kari and Ruth are positioned at the left and right ends of each panel, with background lines linking them. Here, we see a definite variation in the lines between the two characters: they are straight when they are face to face, randomly curved when their eyes contact, and then pronouncedly and artistically swirly when they are obviously nude and Kari is holding Ruth by the thighs. "Whatever love laws have to be broken, the first few seconds suffice," the story below states (69). The lines in Patil's art are straight, but the transgressive gay love twists them into something more akin to the perilous "cursive" of the diasporic California desert in Divakaruni. I would contend that this diasporic exodus is portrayed in Divakaruni's text as a metaphor for

what is fundamentally also a daring queer sexual experience for the narrator, even if it is physical and literal (where Mira really journeys to Sacramento via the Californian desert).

The story's title serves as the most direct allusion to this cliché, which is the blossoming cactus of the desert, which symbolizes both the diasporic landscape and queer yearning inside the book. Thus, Radhika and Mira become close while reading The Great Deserts of the American West. The book describes the desert cacti, which Radhika uses as a metaphor for Mira in her hidden love poem, and how they unexpectedly sprout soft blossoms from within their unlikely thorny hard exteriors. The cacti are part of the symbolic and literal diasporic space of the desert. Mira and Radhika spent hours cuddled up with this book, which depicts "vibrant coronets of hedgehog cactus, candy cactus and prickly pear that push out through the plants' spiny armament"—a picture that represents the unexpected beauty of queer love—and the cacti's "brief flowering," an allusion that suggests the transience of queer love despite societal resistance.

When Radhika brings up the book's depiction of the cactus, Mira subtly confesses that she had "always imagined their thorns to be stinging, poisonous" (187), further implying that queer desire might be harmful. The "evening light" in the photograph catches a particular "fineness so that they shine, exalted, like the hair of infants" (187), despite this foreboding message about the lethal cactus thorns. Despite societal accusations and personal fears, Radhika's love poem—found on a crumpled and discarded piece of paper that Mira finds by chance later—and its subdued gurgling sexuality have a profound and impactful effect, suggesting innocence beneath the supposedly corruptive nature of queer desire. As Mira's writer, Radhika:

"You, cactus blossom,

blossoming thorn-free,

in the desert of my heart." (205)

The desert cactus in full bloom becomes a potent and terrifying symbol that encourages and forbids, with undertones of queer sexual desire and diasporic life. It seems that the language of diaspora is where queer sexuality takes form; this is not only a physical condition, unlike Mira's real voyage; rather, it is a mental condition that mixes intricately and strongly with queer experience. This text's queer sexuality chimes with a broader portrayal of the diasporic state, which is personified by the (Californian) desert, a metaphor that is both promising and dangerous. With all the possibilities this terrain offers, the narrator seemed to be welcoming

it: I had the ambition of reaching the peak of the tallest dune. I want a complete metamorphosis. "Above, vultures waited to swoop down on the helpless skitter of smaller creatures." (168) This is happening despite the obvious danger of predators in this diasporic area. (168) In time, her concerns start to fade: "Some of the scared hardness at my core was melting in the desert's heat." Since my arrival in the United States, "I was a burning wind," and all the possibilities that come with this change to diasporic life take flight. I was quite sensitive. I was planning to go to California. (168) She briefly experiences "desert-dangerous" feelings, which she associates with her impending sexual and diasporic adventures, but these feelings quickly fade as she becomes "tired and, again, afraid" upon inhaling the familiar Indian aromas emanating from Malik-ji's restaurant—"the old, known smells and the boundaries they once promised" (172). On closer inspection, what at first glance seem to be remarks about the physical displacements (and the crossing of topographical "boundaries") that accompany a diasporic shift take on the quality of a metaphor. Here, the concerns and interests surrounding a geographical diaspora start to allude to a diasporic mentality, and via it, to a queer sexual life that shares numerous of the same complexities and anxieties.

By assisting us in diasporizing the queer, queer sexuality effectively becomes a diasporic condition, both symbolically and verbally. "Who is to say?"' the narrator says at the very end, bringing these two threads together in the most direct way possible. "Who are we to judge a woman's feelings when they express delight in the bare, naked skin of a desert woman or another woman's sand-brown figure?" (208) Most obviously, when the narrator attempts to envision the (fictional) journey of the "woman in the photo" (perhaps by "a bus" when "she moved to the hills," as Mira says), the image of the woman in the desert that Radhika and Mira see in the book ends up sliding into this conceptual whiteboard. (208) The desert, which has come to represent both diasporic destination and gay yearning, seems to be the place the lady has reached. In addition, Mira questions whether anyone had cautioned the woman about "saying what she was doing, it just wasn't right, wasn't natural"—criticisms that combine the woman's sister-in-law's words with the stereotypical condemnation of women's independent (diasporic) travel and (queer) sexual adventures that one typically hears in society (208). At the end of her story, Mira boldly proclaims, "I decide I know whom she is smiling at," the revolutionary character of the woman's gay love: "It is her lover, the woman whose shadow has entered the photograph, and in doing so shifted the balance of light" (209, emphasis mine), revealing the woman's "small, secret smile" (208) and the secret of her queer desire. "On the long bus ride south, and later, in sand and rock, among the fierce momentary blooming of

cacti," Mira writes about her love for Radhika, incorporating the contradictory images of desert travel and blooming cacti. She's Radhika, and I'm going to rest my head on her shoulder. My fingertips will caress her scar..." (a) (2009) On one level, the South Asian queer female body imprints itself on the Californian desert, challenging geographical and sexual hierarchies. However, central to this essay is the way queer sexuality is portrayed as akin to an imagined diasporic state of mind through Radhika and Mira's desire. As a result, the queer experience is further marginalized.

Because neither the author nor the text in Kari by Amruta Patil is obviously situated in the diaspora, a similarly evident diasporization of the LGBT experience occurs in this work. My argument is that the textual construction of the gay experience alludes to the imagined diasporic condition, and not in a simple sense. Ruth takes flight to an unknown nation, escaping the truth of her homosexual connection with Kari, and thus represents one side of the diasporic journey's argument against the recognition of queer desire. While Kari, who is based in Mumbai, considers, cultivates, and acts upon her queer desire in relation to Ruth and her distant life, the diasporic condition is one that persists in characterizing, fueling, and flavoring the many aspects of homosexual love. After Ruth's suicide attempt, Kari imagines that she and Ruth are physically apart and that Ruth is boarding an aircraft to go. Aerial views of the city must have been her final recollection of it. Embers of light splattered on a black backdrop. She crossed the airport, which was really a ford. Ruth stands out in the illustration—the only one awake and staring as the plane disappears from Kari's skyline—as the other passengers doze off. It's a powerful symbol of queer desire and diasporic departure that the others would rather ignore (6-7). This iconic moment in the diasporization of queer love is heightened by a two-page extended depiction, the aerial view of a city submerged in darkness (suggesting both loneliness and ignorance), and the paradoxical power of the airport as a ford, which paradoxically provides Ruth with both escape and empowerment. To begin with, it's a weird longing loss because Kari keeps bemoaning Ruth's leaving (for instance, when she sees a lady on the street, she wonders, "Would she fall in love with me forever and never leave?") (54). At the same time that leaving Mumbai for an unnamed foreign country allows Ruth to more openly pursue a gay relationship outside of India, it also gives the occasion for the assertion of queer love and desire throughout the text.

Similar to the dual nature of contemporary diasporic displacement, this estrangement from gay desire is seen as both powerful and isolating, depressing and forceful. However, the textual link between gay and diasporic experiences is much more nuanced. One side of the story has

Ruth's departure from Kari as the pinnacle of diasporic flight, which rejects queer desire. But in the last pages of the book, the "faraway city" is described as a place "where the palette was pure and bright," an idealized landscape that, in contrast to the squalor and filth of Mumbai's gutter-like neighborhood, promises gay love through its radiant light (116). You may see this dichotomy between Bombay/Mumbai, with its damp and aggressive streets, and Divakaruni, with its dry and liberating outside city. Patil supports this notion that people in faraway lands have magical potential with Kari's "snow globe with a winterscape inside" and the "Fairytale Hair" commercial's recurring motif (48, 11). Kari sets the snow globe on her "bedside table"—a spot secretive enough to soothe the soul and strategic enough to inject dreams—indicative of the closeness of the diasporic backdrop to her inner fantasies of gay love and sexuality. It presents what seems like a typical global metropolis scene: "Church, park bench, girl standing shin-deep in snow." As Kari describes the snow globe, she says: "Tip the snow globe over and a blizzard of slow snow falls over church and bench and girl." This suggests a terrifying possibility of the world flipping upside down, a change from this (foreign) winterland to maybe the Indian reality, or a change from the heteronormative paradigm to queer desire. (48) Kari immediately grasps the danger of this dream's self-reversal over an internal binary: "What is it about snow globes that makes them fascinating and terrifying at once?" Kari describes the terrifying scenario in which passion and romance are contingently divided along sexual and geographical lines in (48):

> *The idea of the snow-globe girl who waits indefinitely, hoping that a fresh snowstorm would fall on her mantle the moment someone else topples her snow-globe world, makes my heart flutter. Her garment is impervious to the wind, and the steeple is safe from birds. (48)*

To escape this brutal arbitrariness, one must break out of this dichotomy and live on a sexual and geographical continuum. In response to Lazarus's question regarding her sexual orientation, Kari suggests a spectrum that lies beneath politically significant but ultimately shallow categories: "I'd say armchair straight, armchair gay, active loner." This is a pivotal statement that I will come back to later in the essay.

In my life, the circus does not exist. I'm thinking about it. (79 points) The combination of Kari's statements and the sarcasm and rudeness visible on her face gives the impression that the categorization of sexual orientation into discrete categories ("armchair straight, armchair gay, active loner") is nothing more than a taxonomic ploy—a meaningless "circus" that exists

only in one's mind and has no bearing on the actual sexual experiences one has. In contrast, queer sexuality is starting to integrate into a more seamless continuity, and the diaspora is showing up in a more substantial way via increased global (geographic) connectedness. The snow globe on Kari's nightstand reveals that this diasporic space—which seems to be more promising for queer sexuality—even if it is geographically outside her grasp, is really very much within her reach. Kari lives in a constructive and enabling continuity by inhabiting this imagined diasporic condition and allowing it to diasporize queer experience. From the suffocating home urbanscape of filth—representing the smelly Mumbai of her daily physical existence—she marches out of the binary of the much-touted sexually liberated global metropolis of diasporic ambition, which is founded on a naive premise of sexual liberation in global metros.

The idea of a sexually liberating city is undermined when the girl in the snow globe, who is subtly situated in a freeing international space, is unable to escape and ends up cutting her finger while sewing. The blood that drips onto the snow creates a beautiful bed of roses, but it is the most terrible kind of roses, representing the only outcome for queer desires. In addition, Kari's dogged battle against the stink and filth of Mumbai as the "Boatman" (Patil 32-4, 97-8) challenges and ultimately overcomes the city's horrible claustrophobia. Despite her seeming problems inside Mumbai, she manages to break out of both of these extremes and imaginatively inhabit the diasporic state of mind, a condition of global cosmopolitanism. Patil takes the diasporic mentality and the geographical global continuity it suggests to its logical conclusion. Cities, in her view, are like interconnected organs that bleed when people leave them (or go from the globe). After Ruth departs, Kari depicts Mumbai as teeming with stifling lifeforces, illustrating how the network of worldwide cities is like a pulsating body. "A city alters when a person leaves," she adds, lying in bed surrounded by the swirly etchings that define the novel's world of queer sexuality. "At dusk, it looks hairy, drops drawbridges, grows new roads" (14).

She on to accentuate the intricate web of connections in our globalized society by saying, "Every day I wander into strange backyards and junk heaps and miraculously find my way out and back to work or home again." (14) Despite the issues with diasporic cosmopolitanism, which I will address in detail below, Cruz-Malave and Manalansan argue that this type of globalization has given the queer rights movement more space to fight for equality and that the "increased global visibility of queer sexualities and cultures in the marketplace has also generated multiple opportunities for queer political intervention through an equally globalized

coalition politics" (1-2). Kari is able to love Ruth, image Ruth as linked to her, and envision Ruth laughing when Kari refuses to take her own life at the conclusion of the book because she is connected with the world and, by extension, with faraway Ruth via this diasporic imagination and global cosmopolitan continuity. Emotionally fulfilling connections and politically effective LGBT action are made possible by the diasporization of queer experience and the rise of an integrated global cosmopolitanism.

The South Asian Queer Experience through the Global Diaspora

It would be a simplification to equate the purported liberatory possibilities of diasporic and queer life when we say that the literary-cultural works under consideration diasporize the queer experience. I will now talk about how this becomes even more apparent when these writers, in the midst of diasporizing queer experience, challenge the teleological premise of queer sexuality—which links a backward non-West to a gay-friendly modern West—and instead establish a framework of South-Asian queer experience, which is distinct, complex, ambiguous, and even revolutionary. Several publications on queer globalization and the queer diaspora argue that global connectedness hinders homosexual politics by promoting a metropolitanist perspective. The Globalization of Sexuality has a helpful concluding section. Binnie addresses the "global gay subject" and whether it has "become as unsustainable as notions of global sisterhood among feminists" (38), while also recognizing the importance of the term "global gay" as an identity label required for official recognition.

"Whether a global gay subject exists, and if so, how can it be characterized" (38), as Binnie explains, has been a contentious and ongoing topic of discussion for quite some time. An assumed "universality of legal constructs involving sexuality and culture" (38), according to Sonia Katyal, is problematic. According to Dennis Altman, everything of American "queer theory" is focused on the Atlantic. (42) According to David Halperin, "queer theory" has mainstreamed the LGBT community and reduced their ability to cause disruption. Peter Drucker, who "rejects the notion that it is Eurocentric to criticize Robert Mugabe's persecution of gays in Zimbabwe" (37-8), is one of those who promote "[t]he notion of a common gay identity" and who stresses the "commonality of a gay identity" globally. Chong Kee Tan, like others, notes that western gay culture is not a monolithic whole. He goes on to demonstrate how different local contexts adopt certain aspects of western gay culture and politics, resulting in a "hybrid sexual culture" that is not an imposition from the West.

A reference to this controversial discussion, Binnie poses the question, "Does the growth of the global gay community reflect an evolutionary model of modernity in which less developed nations are advancing toward the recognition of lesbian and gay rights as the pinnacle of modernity, as the last stage of development?" (38). "The diffusion, or more sinisterly, the imposition of Anglo-American queer sexual norms" (38), as Binnie puts it, "could reflect a denial of indigenous or folk forms of sexuality" and the "strategic essentialism" of the global homosexual identity. The fact that this is contingent and subjective means that it will never be resolved. It is undeniable that such unity is frequently based on a relatively privileged (and often Westdependent) metropolitan continuity across the globe, even though it is politically and socially strategic for gay populations of different countries to merge movements and demands due to common concerns. In this global discourse, the discrepancy between the actual lived experiences of diverse LGBT populations in South Asian nations, for example, risks being ignored and disregarded. For this reason, it is critical that we include contextual details from nations and places outside the global north into our human understandings and academic investigations of local problems. Paying close attention to these complexities, the texts being discussed cast doubt on an elite, global homosexual identity hub by revealing its internal cracks. Thus, Kari, who is based in Mumbai, is intensely aware of this elite urban privilege that disregards local reality, even if she finds global cosmopolitan connectivity advantageous in certain ways. Chapter "Love Song" reflects, if only fleetingly, an understanding of the distinct South Asian sexual reality as it pertains to class disparity. A group orgy ("a snake pit of entwined arms," 76) and a homosexual encounter involving Kari and a stranger follow the picture of upper-class cosmopolitan sexual recklessness among Billo, Delna, Orgo, Zap, and Vicky. As soon as this transnational style of heterosexual and gay personal relationships demands worldwide attention, a completely new reality is shown. Having accompanied Lazarus on his nighttime strolls with a camera, Kari goes on to detail the individuals who slept on the sides of the road in the chapter that follows. "She notices:

> *They go to the streets, benches, and carts for slumber. Arms cradling bodies, legs tucked beneath, a protective ball warding off the nighttime dangers. This viewing is a terrible thing. We would be susceptible to peeping tom charges if our victims had more money. Just the way it is, our stroll provides artistic black-and-white images of dreary city life. (78)*

"How do you believe they reproduce out here?" Lazarus inquires of Kari. In response, Kari states, "Furtively. barely covered. (78) The worldwide cosmopolitan discourse that demands

attention and consumption is savagely criticized in this. The often-trendy "sexile" or "gay cosmopolitan subject" (Wesling, 31) is based on a plain desire for public exposure and market-driven demands for commodification, but this harsh reality is presented to the reflective reader as an alternative. This is explained by Cruz-Malave and Manalansan:

> *In our modern, consumer-driven, globalized society, queerness has become both a commodity and a means of self-expression for queers in a world where the "private" is increasingly turned into a commodity through marketing. Nonqueers use queerness as a means to channel their passions and money. (1)*

Because of this, "the social and political significance of queer sexualities and culture to a commodity exchangeable in the marketplace" (2) is reduced as a result of globalization. The opposite side of poverty-stricken existence, where visibility is an imposed imposition and an inherited tragedy, and where privacy is an expensive luxury and denied right, is contrasted with this elite trend for visibility in Kari's tale. This is the reality for those living on the streets, where individuals are seen as they mate in broad daylight by curious onlookers and whose misery is turned into a marketable product by the artistic cameras of the well-to-do ("arty b&w pictures of grim urban life"). Kari beautifully captures the issue with the worldwide language around LGBT rights in a climax scenario that follows the stroll. Lazarus then presses the issue by asking, "Are you, like, a proper lesbian?" "A proper lesbian?" Kari asks with a heavy voice, and she mulls over the question further:

> *When I put the word "lesbian" into my mouth, I get an uncomfortable feeling. Something like to a fleshy, salivating, just arrived from Lesbia, completely unsuitable. (79 points)*

Gopinath notes that Mehta's Fire exhibits a similar uneasiness with the uniform global lexicon that is incompatible with the South Asian experience of queer sexuality, as Sita informs Radha that their relationship has no term in their [Indian] language. Gopinath discusses how Chughtai and Mehta's distinctive presentation of a South Asian gay sensibility differs greatly from its western counterparts. In her discussion of South Asian culture, Gopinath highlights the "depiction of queer female desire emerging at the interstices of rigidly heterosexual structures, detailing the ways in which desire is routed and rooted within the space of the middle-class home." Characters in the South Asian context "are able to access pleasure and fantasy through unofficially sanctioned sites that function as 'escape hatches' from the strictures of conjugal heterosexual domesticity," in contrast to the international rhetoric that demands public

visibility and legal identity. The boundaries of the house and "the domestic," as opposed to a secure "elsewhere," are where "female same-sex desire and pleasure [is located] firmly." (Gopinath 153) The private pleasures that Sita and Radha develop without their uncaring husbands knowing, as well as Begum Jaan's covert sexual relationships with other women in the privacy of her quarters (while her husband pursues young, nubile boys himself), are examples of such unusual forms of bonding. As an illustration, consider the "trope of dressing and undressing"—a "performance of hyperbolic femininity"—and the "erotic interplay" between Radha and Sita, which "encodes female same-sex eroticism within sites of extreme heteronormativity" and "references the specific modality of South Asian femininity in the popular Indian films like Utsav or Razia Sultan" (Gopinath 154).

Other examples include "Radha[’s] rub[bing] [of] oil into Sita’s hair" (Gopinath 153–4) and Sita massaging Radha’s feet at a family picnic. While going on a date with Ajit in an avatar (a short lacy white dress, stiletto heels, and "glittery crimson" lipstick) that is as contrived for her own self as it is shocking to Radhika, this latter type of intimacy reappears in Divakaruni's story, where Radhika similarly massages jabakusum oil into Mira's hair—a form of loving and erotic intimacy ("her fingers make little circles" on Mira's scalp and "trace the small dip behind each ear, 186). This emphasis on the locality of the South Asian experience is reminiscent of writers like Michael Peter Smith (2001), John Tomlinson (1999), and Jon Binnie (2005), among many others, who argue that a less fatalistic view of globalization is necessary. They contend that the economic determinism of the globalization narrative must be abandoned in favor of emphasizing the agency of the local, refusing to see the local "as authentic and embedded," "devoid of agency and merely the victim of globalizing processes" (Binnie 35). By fusing memories of and connections to her brutal but personal South Asian past with Mira's diasporic queer experientiality, Divakaruni's tale similarly disrupts the exuberant discourse of the global queer identity. As a result, Mira is constantly reminded of her mother by Radhika's behavior, and the story's final thought, in which she describes her last loving union with Radhika, is tinged with a grim and agonizing reminder of numerous unspoken desires and longings that originate from her own particular cultural background. She states:

> *I am going to rest my head on her shoulder. I'll touch her scar with my fingertips in the manner of a Braille reader. Maybe the words for my night with Ajit will be there. The tank of water. The woman bathing in the ocean at Bombay. For my mother, who likewise had the view that you must sacrifice your own life in order to rescue the person you love. (208)*

She acknowledges that she is yearning for these terms rather than the universal categories of "armchair straight, armchair gay, active loner," which Kari parodies: "There are so many words I am searching for, I who had stopped believing in their possibility." (208) As a result, the imagined diasporic state that queer experientiality conjures up is powerfully revealed in these works, demonstrating how a diasporization of the queer experience not only provides the diaspora as a metaphor for queer experience but also makes it easier to problematize the global gay imaginary. It enables the expression of problematic and exorcised feelings and subaltern realities from South Asian culture, which are difficult to express in the home country. Its portrayal also serves to counter the cosmopolitan elitism of international queer discourse.

CONCLUSION

Identity has so many facets, it is very difficult to describe and categorize. Furthermore, the work becomes much more academically stimulating when discussing diasporas. Therefore, the goal of the current research was to follow the development of different identity formation processes using the broad perspective of diasporic sociological and critical theories. The diaspora of South Asian poets living in North America and the United Kingdom are also taken into consideration for their 21st-century publications. This chronology is significant because the global order has been evolving throughout the current century, characterized by more technology and communication capabilities than ever before. Such developments significantly impact the maintenance of diasporic identity practices in the country of settlement by speeding up mobilities. As a result, identities lose their rigidity and disprove limiting factors. "Liquid homes" are encouraged to be populated with this identity fluidity. Through recollections of the (home) landscape, the diasporas of the second and third generations inhabit the "home." However, the South Asian diaspora groups' growing receptivity to various cultures—both domestic and foreign—creates a cosmopolitan atmosphere that does, in fact, change their identities. The South Asian diaspora's poetry reflects all of these elements in great detail.

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