

HOMEcoming: A SURVEY OF THE CHANGING NARRATIVE OF DIASPORIC RETURN IN 21ST CENTURY SOUTH ASIAN FICTION

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Abstract

One of the most persistent motifs in postcolonial literature has been that of homecoming. The protagonist of the classic postcolonial novel is a global migrant, displaced from his roots and homeland, grappling with issues of cosmopolitan rootlessness amidst memories of the lost home. A number of contemporary South Asian fiction on emigration, however, represents the trope of reverse migration not essentially within the context of the personal schema of negotiating private memories of the lost homeland, but invokes political issues of communal identity, environmental concerns and labour exploitation in the contemporary era of globalization, war on terror and transnational capitalism. This paper looks at contemporary South Asian fictions, particularly based on India and Pakistan, that foreground the notion of homecoming outside the conventional diasporic tropes of private memory, nostalgia for mythical homelands, and irreversible alienation, and instead reimagines the protagonists' return as affected by larger socio-cultural-economic concerns on a global scale. Subsequently, placing these novels in the context of the continued importance of the postcolonial nation state in the era of globalization, this paper also aims to look at the literary imagining of the postcolonial nation state as a recuperative space against the repressive forces of globalization.

Keywords: South Asian diasporic fiction, homecoming, nation, globalization etc.

One of the most persistent motifs in postcolonial literature has been that of homecoming. The protagonist of the classic postcolonial novel is a global migrant, displaced from his roots and homeland, grappling with issues of cosmopolitan rootlessness amidst memories of the lost home. While nostalgia for the lost home, embodied into a mythical space of "imaginary homelands", materializes as a motif of intense desire for return in diasporic fictions, the process of actual return is often accompanied by a further alienation from the homeland that estranges, frustrates and threatens. Between the unrequited desire for return and the disappointment of actual return, homecoming has been recurrently invoked in South Asian diasporic fiction as an important theme of subjective reconciliation with the past for the deterritorialized identities of the diaspora. A number of contemporary South Asian fiction on

emigration, however, represents the trope of reverse migration not essentially within the context of the personal schema of negotiating private memories of the lost homeland, but invokes political issues of communal identity, environmental concerns and labour exploitation in the contemporary era of globalization, war on terror and transnational capitalism. This paper looks at contemporary South Asian fictions, particularly based on India and Pakistan, that foreground the notion of homecoming outside the conventional diasporic tropes of private memory, nostalgia for mythical homelands, and irreversible alienation, and instead reimagines the protagonists' return as affected by larger socio-cultural-economic concerns on a global scale. Subsequently, placing these novels in the context of the continued importance of the postcolonial nation state in the era of globalization, this paper also aims to look at the literary imagining of the postcolonial nation state as a recuperative space against the repressive forces of globalization.

Late twentieth century postcolonial fiction, especially in English, has been dominated by narratives of the diasporic protagonists and their cosmopolitan rootlessness. The recurrence of this convention is symptomatic of the postcolonial writers' own expatriate status, as Elleke Boehmer points out:

For different reasons, ranging from professional choice to political exile, writers from a medley of once-colonized nations have participated in the late twentieth-century condition of migrancy.... In the 1990s the generic postcolonial writer is more likely to be a cultural traveler, or an 'extra-territorial', than a national. Ex-colonial by birth, 'Third World' in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, he or she works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national background. (232-3)

In literary texts, the writers' own anxiety with migration and relocation takes the form of the stock figure of the diasporic protagonist grappling with the dilemma between the transmutation of acculturation and the stasis of older loyalties. The diasporic protagonist is in a perpetual fix on the question of belonging---his assimilation into the host nation is never complete, with a longing for the lost homeland persistently lingering in his state of being. The trope of homecoming thus assumes a symbolic meaning of returning to one's roots, a personal journey to negotiate the hauntings of the past and inching towards self-assertion from the dilemma of in-betweenness and rootlessness. Observing the predominance of the homecoming motif in postcolonial fictions from varied literary cultures, Vera Mihailovich-Dickman offers a survey of how the notion of return haunts the literatures of the Caribbean islands, Africa, South Asia and Australia. Dickman points out that Caribbean poetry, exemplified through Derek Walcott's famous ruminations on double-consciousness, is rich in a sense of expatriate longing for a lost collective identity displaced by the colonial process and an emphasis on 'metaphorical return', keeping faith with the "Caribbean of the mind" (x). In Australian fiction, 'homeland' invokes a dilemma of belonging historicized, against the original displacement from England and a negotiation with Australia's decolonised

autonomy. Return to home in Australian fiction seen in works of Patrick White thus, as Gay Raines observes in the same volume, engages with a metaphorical universal quest for identity beyond the specificity of a geographical place (41-42). Of all the these, African fiction presents the widest spectrum of homecomings, as Dickman recounts through the works of Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Wole Soyinka and others, that engage with a variety of themes like exile, spiritual return and personal quest. Identifying the return to home as a recurrent motif in postcolonial diasporic fiction, Mahmud Rahman lists the essential characteristics of return novels that include i) autobiographical similarities with the diasporic author, ii) a return to specific place, house or neighbourhood, iii) return to a community and host of characters from the past iv) journey as a motif of change and reconciliation and v) a realist mode of writing. While this list is neither exhaustive nor quintessential to account for every return narrative in postcolonial diasporic fiction, it nevertheless highlights the recurrent motifs of return narratives that signify a personal quest for the protagonist.

The trope of the lost homeland and a desire for return haunts South Asian diasporic fiction almost invariably. The notion of “deferred home and myth of return”, as Ruth Maxey observes, haunts British Asian literature as a recurrent motif. Citing Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Sarfraz Manzoor’s *Greetings from Bury Park* and Abdullah Hussain’s *Émigré*, Maxey observes how the protagonist’s desire to return makes him/her imagine the homeland as a deferred final destination that would bring closure to the journey of the emigrant. The homeland is thus often etched in terms of nostalgia, conjured as a mythical, dreamlike place crystallized in the consciousness of the emigrant and defined through intensely personal memories. As Rushdie cogently sums up the construct of the imaginary homelands:

Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by an urge to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

Return in South Asian diasporic fiction is thus often intricately tied to a personal journey to one’s past or the roots---a longing to reclaim back a sense of belonging to the place of origin. This personal journey is exemplified in fictions like Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of the Day*. Desai’s protagonist, Tara, reconciles unresolved familial tensions through her return from the US. For Tara, the return is deeply personal journey that opens up her past with her siblings, who now having grown apart from each other, rekindle their connections and reconcile with a sense of closure. Tara’s return is thus just a catalyst for the reminiscences, for the narrative focus shifts from Tara to her siblings, offering a rich tapestry of the characters’ coming of age against the historical backdrop of India’s partition and post-partition. Having faced the ghosts of the past, the act of return ceases to hold any further significance for Tara who goes back. This intensely personal dimension of the return journey is also seen in Amit

Chaudhury's *A New World* as well, whereby Jayojit languidly floats through a personal journey in his visit to Calcutta. Divorced and a single father staying in the US, Jayojit rediscovers himself through the cityscape he had left behind, the internal monologues and reflections accounting for all the action in the novel. Return in South Asian novel portraying the diaspora is often a gesture of self-introspection brought out through the journey motif; conceived as more of a metaphysical construct than a physical, geographical place, the homeland here assumes a symbolic connotation in the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery.

However, returns are not always reconciliatory. A more prominent motif in the diasporic return novels is that of the disenchantment the protagonist feels on his/her actual encounter with the mythical homeland; the desired return paradoxically ends with a sense of farther alienation for the protagonist who encounters a different homeland than the imaginary ones, making them despair for a release from the homeland again. Thus the US settled Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter* returns to the Calcutta of her childhood only to be jerked into the labour unrest and political turbulence that Tara finds distressing. The Calcutta of her childhood has changed irreversibly, and the bleakness and poverty she witnesses in her visit threatens and alienates her, making her yearn for the return to the US. Narrated from an unapologetically elite perspective, *Tiger's Daughter* records the typical frustrations of a privileged expatriate who hopes to find the homeland in a static, pristine state and is shocked into realization by the presence of the quotidian mob. For Priya in Amulya Malladi's *Mango Season*, the dilemma is reverse. Priya's transit to USA has left an indelible mark on her, changing her worldview while her family back in India remain frozen in time. Priya's return to India reveals not only the irreconcilable differences and her reverse culture shock, but also the physical and sensory discomfort that she finds hard to endure, thus shattering every bittersweet memory of India she carried from her childhood. As Maxey comments on the host of similar fictions on return---Manju in *For Matrimonial Purposes*, May in *Motherland*, Kirin Narayan's *Love, Stars and All That*, Bapsi Sidwa's *American Brats*, G.S Sarat Chandra's *Sari of the Gods*---that "it is almost as though return to South Asia and the severing of nostalgic links...form a necessary stage in making the transition to a more fully-fledged American status" (87). Significantly, since the trauma of homecoming is narrated predominantly through female subjects who feel constricted by the conservative, patriarchal societal norms of their native countries, reverse migration often invokes a gendered discourse on diaspora versus the homeland embodied in the personal journey of the female protagonist. However, for protagonists like Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, the ordeal of homecoming conjures up issues way beyond the personal realm. Anil encounters a war-torn Sri Lanka that has turned corrupt, violent and genocidal, threatening Anil's non-conformation with dire consequences. Similarly, though Maya's return in Tahmima Anam's *Good Muslim* and the consequent estrangement with her brother is wrought in the intimacy of her private life, the novel reveals a bleak poster of Bangladesh's steady descent to Islamic fundamentalism.

after the civil war—an ironic turn of events in a country founded on cultural and secular principles. A similar trajectory of political violence is narrated in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*. Mira's return and her initial optimism is mired by the violence she witnesses in the police atrocities through Rameeza Bee's rape and the brutal murder of her husband. The sheer magnitude of state corruption and the repressive state machinery jerks Mira to a deeper realization of the unresolvable issues that trouble India. More often than not, return novels thus reveal a deeply flawed, chaotic and even dangerous homeland against the backdrop of violence and political turbulence. Here it is helpful to recall Makarand Paranjape's distinction between the older diaspora and the new diaspora in the context of the Indian diaspora. As Paranjape points out, the older diaspora—consisting of subaltern and underprivileged classes dislocated by colonial labour and indentured migration who could never return-- imagines the homeland as a sacred site or symbol frozen in memory. The spiritual restructuring of the host land, accompanied by a fetishization of the symbols and icons they carried, constructed the homeland as a mythical, unreturnable space in the diasporic imaginary. In comparison, the new diaspora—consisting mostly of second generation diasporic Indians and voluntary emigrants who have unrestrained access to India—construct the homeland in a more cynical manner, seeing it as an area “of darkness, confusion, violence, but a hopeless and doomed country which much be rejected” (245). Though Paranjape particularly mentions Naipaul and his utterly bleak portrayal of India in *Million Mutinies* and the other travelogues, the metropolitan writer's apathy towards the nation and its borders is evident in innumerable texts.

The prominent discourse that emerges from these novels is the popular conceptualization of the postcolonial nation-state as a dystopian entity with its parochial, repressive machinery, operating on divisive and violent forces. As the 20th century witnessed the excesses of nationalism leading to the evils of colonialism, holocaust, world wars and inter-ethnic conflicts, the dominant cultural theories of the period including postmodernism and postcolonialism have focused on concepts of a “postnational” culture, celebrating notions of hybridity, migrancy, cosmopolitanism, liminality and others that signal the arrival of a new era of democracy-without-borders. Subsequently, the postcolonial nation state has been conceptualized as intricately flawed organization forcibly attempting homogeneity at the cost of violently oppressing its own people. Early postcolonial theorists—including Bhaba, Chatterjee, Fanon, Spivak—unanimously express their deep distrust about the nation state. Thus locating a “particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation” (1), Bhaba theorizes the nation as a mutating construct whose metaphorical unity is an impossibility, being constantly challenged from the diverse forces within: “in this sense then the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as containing thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production” (1). Partha Chatterjee's *Nation and Its Fragments* is an impassioned critique of the

postcolonial Indian state that thrives by co-opting its marginal communities into a meta-narrative of homogenous nationalism. For Chatterjee, nationalism is “a dark, elemental, unpredictable force of primordial nature threatening the orderly calm of civilized life” (4). Theorizing the nation state as an essentially bourgeois construct, Fanon despairs at how anti-colonial movements are inevitably usurped by the native bourgeoisie to produce a postcolonial nation state that not only alienates the commoner masses but also paves way for neo-colonial capitalistic exploitation. Mired with such problematics, the “demise” of the nation state as a result of contemporary globalization has more often been celebrated than mourned.

The late 20th century thinkers have thus emphatically spoken for statelessness over the borders of the nation, globalization over national belonging. Appadurai proclaims the death knoll of the nation-state with the emergence of the “diasporic public sphere” asserting that the nation state is on “its last legs” and will not be able to sustain itself as “long term arbiters between globality and modernity” (19). The nation-state has thus been perceived as both vicious and obsolete, with the political and cultural discourse of our contemporary times shifting to global, transnational paradigms. It is to be noted that more than the idea of the ‘nation’, it is the political construct of the ‘state’ that has been cited as the crux of the problem. Thus, critics like Fanon and Spivak make space for “nation” thinking but vehemently oppose the parochialism of the geo-political construct of the “nation-state”. Thus, while Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* calls for an idealistic nation based on popular nationalism arising out of the grassroot movement of the masses as an abstraction but cautions against the actuality of the political form, Spivak in seminal works like *Who Sings the Nation-State* and *Nationalism and Imagination* advocates a deterritorialized “cultural nationalism” over the territorial “political nationalism” or what she calls as “the re-invention of the civic state in the so-called Global South, free of the baggage of nationalist identitytarianism, and inclining toward a critical regionalism, beyond the national boundaries” (88). In keeping with these perspectives, postcolonial literature, particularly from the diasporic perspective, invokes nation thinking in ambiguous, deterritorialized forms while rejecting the oppressive, restrictive politico-legal site that is the ‘state’.

Yet, South Asian narratives of migration and homecoming in the 21st century have noticeably changed in the way the nation state is imagined. While one of the major waves of contract, low wage and wageless labor migration of South Asians was facilitated by the British colonial system of indentured labor and the modes of its economic exploitation, contemporary labor migration from South Asia have been redefined by more amorphous forces of global capital flow that has decentralized the affluent economic hubs beyond the Anglo-American geopolitical space to global centers of Middle East and South East Asia as well. Saskia Sassen points out that the globalization of capital, particularly after the neoliberal economic reforms in the 70s and 80s have led to the emergence of a new kind of economic centers—the global cities that serve as central nodes for management of international trade,

investment and form the heart of the world economy. Consequently, as Sassen notes, the transnationalization of capital has gradually led to a shrinking of manufacturing jobs and demand for blue-collar skilled workers, and instead has led to an escalation of demand for low wage jobs. Labor migration from the global south in a post-globalization economy thus often constitutes low wage service sector jobs which are paid minimally, are oppressive and come with no labor protection. Though the conditions of indentured labor was distinctly different from labor migration today, yet the structures of inequality, labor exploitation, racial and gender discrimination that define the expatriate experience of low wage, undocumented laborers overseas often echo the discriminatory structures of the indentured system and point to the power hierarchies of global capitalism.

Significantly enough, studies on South Asian literature on the diaspora have long been silent about the experiences of these non-elite diasporas. Canonical South Asian diasporic fiction and films have primarily engaged with the anxieties and tribulations of a particular elite immigrant experience-- the economically successful, highly educated, technically skilled professionals constituting the model minority image--whereby the conversation in canonical diasporic cultural texts is primarily focused on the issues of cultural crisis even in a context of economic affluence and citizenship security, like in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* centers around the gender anxieties of the second generation affluent *desi* who clashes with more traditionally bound parents like in Gurinder Chaddha's *Bend It Like Beckham*. Consequently, scholarship on South Asian diasporic literature and culture have primarily engaged with the elite diasporic experience, discussing at length the issues of homeland, memory, cultural duality, hybridity and generational anxieties of an expatriate experience—but one that is above the other materialistic issues of the low wage labor diaspora concerning bureaucratic harassment, inhuman living conditions, and economic exploitation, along with cultural and religious racialization as well. With the dominance of transnational capitalism that followed the post-cold war turn to economic neoliberalism as well as ethnic othering that has followed the contemporary discourses on war on terror, stringent border controls, more contemporary narratives on globalization have shifted from the euphoria of cultural globalization and utopian cosmopolitanism to revive the political construct of the state as a "ground" for political struggle in globality. As numerous literary texts imagine the postcolonial nation state as a political refuge against the repressive forces of globalization, the 21st century "return to home" novels of writers like Hamid Mohsin, H.M Naqvi, Benyamin, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh and others as represent the continued significance of the nation state as a site of refuge and resistance against globalization.

For the contemporary Pakistani 'return to home' novels, the disillusionment with the global metropolis of the West is predominantly a product of the post 9/11 Islamophobia and the identarian politics that Muslims have been subjected to globally. Pei-Chen-Liao organizes his reading of the new diaspora on the central trope of 9/11, arguing that "by reading these novels as examples of world literature, I argue that South Asia, diaspora, and the uncanny

enable us to arrive at a more complex conception of the world and global belonging in an age of globalization and to rethink the questions of violence and identity in the post-9/11 era.” The most obvious example of this genre is Hamid Mohsin’s *Reluctant Fundamentalist* that traces Changez’s journey from the alleys of the Wall Street to his return to Lahore. A stellar student at Princeton University, a successful employee at a prestigious financial firm and living in the heart of cosmopolitan New York, Changez seems to be living the perfect American dream that flattens out his ethnic, religious and national identities in a capitalistic utopia. Though Mohsin reveals a less than perfect world for Changez—Erica’s father’s gross stereotyping of Pakistanis being a case in point—Changez complacently settles in the skin of his American identity---as he terms it as a “a semi-hypnotic gaze” (157) till things shake up after the 9/11. While it is the surge in public Islamophobia that alienates Changez, reducing him to his quintessential religious identity, his disillusionment with America’s neo-colonial empire takes into purview the dual forces of both capitalism and war on terror, making him lean more towards his Pakistani, Muslim self. His return to his homeland is a political decision that goes beyond the personal grief of losing Erica, and the national boundaries of the state of Pakistan provides him with a tangible platform for anti-American dissent. Working with his local community, Changez’s nation-bound life offers him more social and intellectual fulfilment than his diasporic one.

In the same manner, the sovereign political body of the state becomes both a refuge and a site of safety for Chuck in H.M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy*. Chuck’s brush with the post 9/11 anti-Muslim aggression in America is however more haunting than Changez. Though both protagonists follow the same trajectory of American assimilation—Chuck too is an English speaking graduate working on Wall Street—Chuck experiences the violence of Islamophobia in America on a more harrowing level. Beaten up, detained, physically abused and denied of the basic human rights due to his religious and national identity, Chuck goes through a spectrum of experiences that cement him as the “other” to the American society. Chuck thus comments on the splintering of the homogenous American identity into different forms of the other: “We’d become Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren’t before. We fancied ourselves boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men” (1). Like Changez, Chuck’s disillusionment with the American dream is not pertained only to the realm of cultural discrimination; as the neoliberal capitalistic market pushes him to economic precarity, Chuck bears testimony to the debilitating effects of the neo-colonial forces of globalization, bringing him to acknowledge the urban working class of New York largely consisting of illegal immigrants from erstwhile colonies. Scarred for life, Chuck leans to parochial identity markers as a process of “resistance identity” (Castells 7-8); his growing affiliation for Islam and Pakistan over his cosmopolitan state of being culminates in his decision to return for good. Though affected personally with the disenchantment of the myth of diasporic assimilation, the protagonists in the two novels portray a larger political consciousness about Islamophobia, Western bigotry and more

specifically, the American hegemony in a post-globalized world. Subsequently the nation state left behind offers new possibilities of resistive existence.

If the return-to-home novels on Pakistani protagonists largely hinge on issues of the global reach of Islamophobia, a number of Indian novels on the same expose the bleak underside of global capitalism and the pitiable lives of illegal immigrants. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Benyamin's *Goat Days* deserve specific mention here. Both Desai and Benyamin shatter the aura of emigration as a utopic passage into affluence and liberty, revealing the dark, ugly visages of labour exploitation. Biju in Desai's *Inheritance* holds a job in America as his father proudly declares to all, and yet a narrative shift to Biju's world reveals precarious lives that thrive in the basements of the dazzling commercial establishments in the heart of the Western cities. Biju's American dream lands him among the global expendable labour in the Euro-American metropolitan centres, teeming with illegal immigrants from poor former colonies who hang on the edge with menial jobs and inhuman living conditions. Biju describes his shelter through metaphors of disorderly proliferation, revealing an alternative dystopic space that teems with the dregs and exclusions of the global economy: "men camping out near the fuse box, behind the boiler, in the cubby holes, and in odd-shaped corners that once were pantries, maids' rooms, laundry rooms, and storage rooms...the men shared a yellow toilet; the sink was a tin laundry trough." Calling his kind as the "shadow class", Biju describes the precarity of an entire band of illegal migrants who endlessly float around in the economy and in the urban space, exploited and disposed of, yet unable to form any coalitions. While his father basks in the glory of his son being an expatriate, Biju's deplorable condition takes a brutal toll on him, damaging him both physically and emotionally. Broken beyond recognition, Biju seeks refuge back in his homeland. He trades his savings for a ticket back home, making the bold plunge to "go back" without any hope for return. The final meeting scene between Biju and his father metaphorizes a resolution to the multiple conflicts that strain the narrative: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent (324). Biju's return to his homeland thus gives order to the otherwise disorderly world of Desai's novel, bringing home the truth to a final resolution.

For Benyamin's protagonist Najeeb Muhammad too, emigration turns into a nightmare he strives to escape. Based on a true story, Benyamin's *Goat Days* (translated from Malayalam) portrays the horrifying ordeal of Indian labour emigrants to the oil-rich Middle East. Najeeb pays handsomely for a work visa to Saudi Arabia, hoping for better economic prospects abroad than what his sand miner's job could bring in the village. However, the reality that he confronts after landing there dispels all myths about the privilege of the expatriate class. Najeeb is sent off to a remote farm in the desert and made to work as a slave labourer tending to the herds of animals. Denied basic rights, Najeeb desperately holds on to the bare minimum means of sustenance that reduces his existence to no better than the animals he attends to. Trapped and tortured in a hostile land, the desire to return to the homeland

culminates as a coveted, yet impossible dream. Visions of the homeland as a romanticised, utopic place of comfort and emotional solace thus haunt Najeeb in sharp contrast to the bleak reality he encounters. Desperate for return, Najeeb makes several failed attempts to escape till he finally succeeds to break free, undertaking a painful, dangerous journey to the Indian consulate with the hope of getting deported. Thus homecoming amends Najeeb's three years long ordeal of suffering, bringing him back to a safer, more emotionally secure sense of belonging. Najeeb's plight not only highlights the dreadful face of transnational labour migration prompted by the open labour market of global capitalism, but also projects the nation state as an asylum against the onslaught of global forces. No matter how far they wander, the homeland remains a haven of safety for the subaltern migrants like Biju and Najeeb.

Apart from these narratives of restitutive homecoming triggered by tales of personal trauma, novels like Sonora Jha's *Foreign* and Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* foreground extrapolated socio-political concerns that are prompted beyond the realm of the personal. Both novels take up environmental concerns affected by the forces of globalization, presenting the protagonist's return as a part of resistive solidarity with the local activism. For the American born Piya in Ghosh's *Hungry Tide*, a short trip to collect research samples from the Sunderbans turns into her decision to permanently return among the local impoverished community that has become inadvertent victims of global conservation policies. While Piya initially sides with the dominant narrative of global conservation prioritizes wildlife over human settlements, she gradually realizes of the near-sightedness of sweeping conservation policies that take a toll on the local, dispossessed communities like the Bangladeshi refugee settlers brutally evicted. The change in Piya's perspective from a global to a local one prompts her decision to return and work in solidarity with the local activists like Mashima. Along similar lines, the young American Kabir's journey back to India in Sonora Jha's *Foreign* is an essentially political gesture of resistance against the debilitating effect of genetically modified crops on the farmers of rural India. What initially began as a search for his biological father for Kabir culminates into a sort of environmental activism that resists the epidemic of debt-ridden farmers' suicides in Vidarbha. Both the novels resolve not only with the trope of return but also the optimism with which the protagonists pledge to continue their strife against the exploitative forces of globalization. At some point, both Piya and Kabir reject their transnational status for a more locally bound position, with the nation-state forming a powerful site for anti-globalization resistance.

An overarching trope that emerges in the contemporary homecoming novels is that a transition from diaspora to transnationalism—of the diasporic consciousness of unbelonging being significantly replaced by a transnational identity of co-belonging, with strong ties with the country of origin. Michel Bruneau succinctly points out the difference between diaspora and transnationalism:

A diaspora has an existence of its own, outside any state, it is rooted in a strong culture (religion, language, etc) and a long history; it has created and developed its community and associative networks. The transnational community on the other hand arises from the migration of workers who retain their family base in the nation-state from which they have come, and they travel between this base and one or several countries where they have settled. They retain a strong anchorage in the place of origin, as well as citizenship or institutional links with their country. In a diaspora, this anchorage and any strong links have often disappeared following a catastrophe, or they may have been entirely re-shaped over time. The transmigrant is far too dependent with on the nation-state from which he originates as well as on the state in which he has settled to become autonomous and creative in the manner of a member of a diaspora.

The diasporic consciousness entails a sense of unbelonging, or as Edward Said puts it, a sense of being “in exile with the world”. Themes of rootlessness have been a staple archetype in older South Asian diasporic narratives, as I discuss above, grappling with the trauma of displacement. In contrast, the diverse homecoming novels is their narrative resolution with the rhetoric of belonging. The new wave of writing on emigration (and not diaspora) thus foregrounds i) a focus on the migrant than the diasporic, through ii) a predominant trend of return narratives that hinge on iii) a political discourse of resistance against the forces of globalization iv) worked out against the locally bound site of the nation state.

With the initial euphoria about globalization settling down by the end of the 20th century, the nation state is reimagined in these writings as both relevant and necessary, particularly in the postcolonial context. Embodying a wide spectrum of roles---from being a political asylum against violent stereotyping, to a refuge against exploitative global networks, to a site of collaboration and powerful grass root resistance---the nation state resurges as an important recuperative trope in narratives of expatriation. The resurgence of the state as a viable political site in the era of globalization is intricately associated with its entrusted democratic function. The nation state, as James Goodman and Paul put it in sync with many other political thinkers like Stephen McBride, Evan et al, Panitch and Pheng Chea, “once reined back under the control of its citizens the nation state can regain its role as the key site of local resistance to powerful globalizing forces” (75). Though hugely contested---the counterargument being that in this perspective, globalization is seen as solely a ‘foreign intervention’ and hence the destructive forces of nationalism are absolved of their damage---the idea has found popular resonance among several anti-globalization activists. The literary imagination of the resurged nation state too is not essentially a eulogy for the golden days of the premodern, nation-bound world. Mohsin’s Pakistan is far from being a utopia---it is divisive and hierarchical in terms of socio-economic privilege; moreover, a perpetual threat of war looms over it while it battles with the stock issues of unplanned urbanism, overpopulation, lack of amenities and rampant corruption that plague most South Asian nations. Similarly, along with a critique of globalization, Desai’s *Inheritance* also

foregrounds a fatalistic picture of parochial nationalism—embodied in Gyan’s fanaticism for insurgency—that adds to the novel’s cynicism towards easy political binaries between the global and the local. No utopia, the homeland that Biju returns to throws him into a different set of challenges, instantly alienating him before he settles into his father’s loving embrace.

The flaws of the nation state are veritably exposed in Jha’s *Foreign* and Ghosh’s *Hungry Tide*—texts that deal with environmental oppression of the local communities. While global forces like the marketing of genetically modified seeds and global conservation policies are shown to play the main actors for wreaking havoc in the lives of the marginalised local people, the nation state—with its corrupt bureaucracy, capitalistic national policies, and utter oblivion of the marginalized sectors—is etched as a complicit participant in the oppressive process. Jha’s novel features a non-resident Indian woman, Katya, as its central protagonist. A single mother located in the US, Katya travels back to India in search of her missing son who has taken off in search of his father. What begins as a personal journey of bringing her son back becomes a journey of larger realizations about the violence of global seed companies and the Vidharbha suicides testifying the plight of the farmers. While Katya resolves her past wounds, and returns to USA to carry on the resistance from there, Katya’s son Kabir stays on in the village to participate in more grassroot activism. Kabir’s return is at once permanent and assertive of his choice to stay back within India to fight the dual forces of global corporate assault and the compliance of local power systems within the boundaries of the nation state. Piya in *Hungry Tide* remains a nonchalant outsider to the local affairs till her field trip reveals to her the detrimental effects of global conservation policies. While unmanned reserved forests for wildlife protection project the romance of a balanced, biocentric ecology, Piya’s brush with the local community reveals to her the ugly, underside of wildlife conservation in a densely populated, third world nation like India. Land for reserved forests—in accordance to the global policies of conservation—are grabbed at the cost of displacing the expendable, marginal communities of refugees as in the historical Morichjhapi incident detailed in the narrative. In Ghosh’s novel, the local population consisting of poor settlers struggling for bare subsistence are doubly marginalised by the global environmental policies as well as the state and the police. While global forces affect the environment and the local communities on a more comprehensive scale, the vagaries of globalization are executed by the local authorities within an immediate context. Thus, the polemic of *Hungry Tide* and *Foreign* point to a nation-bound resistance. Both the novels foreground a similar discourse of the homecoming of a diasporic protagonist, his/her encounter with environmental crises forged by the forces of globalization, and the consequent coalitions of resistance s/he builds up with the nationally bound local communities. Thus, for Kabir and Piya, the protagonists of *Foreign* and *Hungry Tide* respectively, the struggle is more against the immediate, tangible forces of local oppression than the invisible forces of globalism. In these immigrant fictions, the home nation is no longer a mythical place constructed in the collective imaginary of the diasporic groups. It is a real, lived space of

refuge, action and agitation, which the protagonist negotiates as part of his/her reconciliation with his/her past homeland. Consequently, the novels do not typically resolve with the diasporic protagonists' disillusionment with the state and their consequent movement back to the diaspora. Rather the new diasporic South Asian subjects return home not to grow wary of it and go back to the diaspora all defeated; Mohsin's *Changez*, Naqvi's *Chuck*, Benyamin's *Najeeb*, Desai's *Biju*, Ghosh's *Piya*, Jha's *Kabir* return with a resolve to stay, to negotiate with their roots, and to resolve issues at a grassroots level, and not to escape into the privileges of a diasporic status. While the South Asian homecoming novels of the 21st century do not essentially absolve the postcolonial nation state from its complicity with the forces of exploitation, they nevertheless imagine it as a democratic site of dissent and space for transnational coalitions.

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