

THEATRE OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SPACE: READING TANIKA GUPTA'S PLAYS SANCTUARY AND FRAGILE LAND

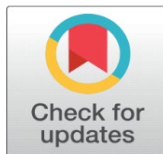
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ABSTRACT

Theatre is a significant cultural production with a degree of performativity entrusted in a particular social context. This article examines the attribution of identity and hybridity upon theatre of Indian diaspora in Tanika Gupta's Plays *Sanctuary* and *Fragile Land* (2003). Drawing upon the concept of diasporic space (Brah), hybridity (Bhabha) and transnational social field the article analyses the negotiation of second-generation British-South Asian subjective entity within the multicultural landscape of UK. It largely interrogates the metanarratives around the reception and production of political, economic and social traits, providing a separate space to an individual playwright where a free flow of dialogue can exist with its uniqueness. Gupta's *Sanctuary* explores the bureaucratic violence and contingency of cross-cultural solidarity among the asylum-seeking mass, who believe in hopeful reconfiguration of home and belonging. Further, *Fragile Land* foregrounds the narrative in inter-generational conflict, oppression of gender, and fractured effect of hybridity, as the characters in the play are forced to choose between competing national and cultural affiliation. Thus, the juxtaposing of these two narratives the paper argues that here diaspora emphasises the strong and continuous cross-border linkages, delimiting the imaginary home while allowing migration to brighten the hope of transnational ties. The identity formation for migrant groups, in the case of diaspora, focuses on the collective identity based on their culture of origin. Transnationalism, on the other hand, strictly focuses on the mobility of the people, and based on that, their identities are constructed. This paper tries to understand the transnational engagement of migrants in analysing theatre productions and, thereby, the performance of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Tanika Gupta's *Sanctuary* and *Fragile Land* records the obliterated transnational self into the hybrid conjunction of the second-generation immigrants but still casts a necessary dilemma of caste, religion, social formation and another such aspects.

Keywords: Theatre, Diaspora, Transnationalism Space, Hybridity, Displacement, Identity



1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the understanding of transnationalism and the notion of the formation of identity in such space has presented an unprecedented academic inclination with the growing influence of international migration. The research, delineating the transnational social formations among the migrants, looks not only after the cross-border affiliation of diaspora associated with socio-cultural belonging but also has a strong connection with the economic and political scenario of the host country. The transnational affiliation discerns the active participation of the migrant personnel/communities. It sometimes creates a dialogue concerning the habitation, resources in living and the propensity of social cohesion in both places. Moreover, the conceptual framework of transnationalism argues the process of integration among migrants and the host country's values and morals. This paper tries to understand the transnational engagement of migrants through an analysis of theatre productions and, thereby, the performance put up by the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Theatre provides a separate space to an individual playwright where he/she can exercise the dilemma in social living into the mould of representation in the manner of conversational dialogue with all its uniqueness. As Buonanno, Sams, and Schlote observe, British Asian theatre cites a dynamic frame for negotiating hybrid cultural identity and challenges the notion of fixed belonging (2011:1). After successive migration, a person who finally settles in place questions the notion of fixed origin. This hybrid existence of appears true even for the children of first-generation migrants born and brought up in the UK and suffering from multiple subject positions. This fluidity of identity in the contemporary world characterised by the words of Bhabha as he termed it 'in-between space' of cultural hybridity (1994: 2). The hyphenated and hybrid space is precisely the state where the plays by Indian playwrights in Britain have been constructed, carrying the mark of that fluidity. The theatrical expressions mirror the transnational geographies, enabling diasporic communities to articulate the conformity between home and host through stage and performance (Rogers 2014:45). Further, the theatre of diaspora as designated in the words of Daniela Salusso is "a kind of theatre which distances itself both from the postcolonial tradition and from the generation of the in-year-face theatre and attempts rather to redefine British identity through a "hybridisation" of the theatrical discourse" (2020:67). The current study engages with the plays *Sanctuary* and *Fragile Land* written by Tanika Gupta, an Indian British playwright who, in her plays, projects the problematics of the transnational identity of the diaspora from different perspectives. The dynamic overview of the multifaceted transnational identity within the South Asian tension of belonging foregrounds the lived contradiction of the diaspora in Britain. The plays analyse the intersecting perspectives of the lived conditions of the diaspora in the UK. In *Fragile Land* (performed in 2003) Gupta deals with the negotiation of nationalism among second-generation migrants. The play explores the fraught negotiation of nationalism and belonging, exposing the fragile constructs of nationhood in a multicultural Britain where young British Asians grapple with competing cultural loyalties, generational divides, and the pressures of assimilation. In contrast, another play *Sanctuary* (performed in 2002), narrates the challenges of national identity for asylum seekers. It dramatises the intersections of displacement, institutional racism, and the search for safety within the British asylum system. As a cluster these plays illustrates how the theatre acts as a critical site for interrogating the fluid nature of diasporic identity in the contemporary transnational landscape.

2. DIASPORA AND THE TRANSNATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Dispersion of people to different places is an age-old process whose meanings and contexts have gone through a substantial change. Formerly, diaspora is understood uniquely as the historical scattering of certain groups, specifically the experience of Armenians and the Jews. Later it confronted the various patterns of voluntary and involuntary migration worldwide. More importantly, towards the end of the 20th century, the term diaspora was reinterpreted and applied variedly over the different facets of international migration. Most of the definitions among them focus on the causes of migration, the experience of distance and the migrant as the minority in the host land who is unable to cope with the host culture. Nevertheless, in recent years this conceptual understanding of diaspora has undergone a drastic formation where the old ideas of the diaspora are encountered with the new ones. For example, the older conception of diaspora refers to the forced migration of the Jews and, most recently, of the Palestinians. However, on the contrary, the newer notion of diaspora frequently refers to any dispersal of people, which also includes, as Cohen mentions, "indentured labourers were augmented by subsequent much larger migration from India, China and Japan for the purpose of work, trade or business" (Cohen 2008:5). Even in cross-border linkages, the older diaspora "retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland" (Safran 2014:83) and nurture the myth of return. In contrast,

the new diaspora emphasises the strong and continuous cross-border linkages, as they do not limit themselves to the imaginary home; in this age of globalisation, migration brightens transnational ties. Moreover, the views regarding incorporating migrant communities in the host country also vary with the dimensions of old and new diaspora. The former implies the impossibility of the migrant population engaging economically, politically and culturally with the countries of settlement. In contrast, the new diaspora breaks the boundaries of discrimination between the home and the host and accepts the hybridity in being. Thus, the contradiction between the old and new diaspora opens up further questions to analyse. In due course of time, the contemporary usage of the term diaspora blurs the distinction among various trans-border affiliations along with the question of the return to the homeland, which has been substituted with a continuous transnational interconnection.

Among the diasporic community, transnational space is an impenetrable and symbolic order between the nation of origin and the nation of destination. The narrative strategy of a nation is an 'apparatus of symbolic power' which, as Bhabha mentions, "produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference'" (1994:140). He also remarks that "the ideas of the nation conflicts with the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture" (1994:141). Thus, transnationalism is rightly defined by Faist as "changing forms of cross-border mobility, membership and citizenship and the compatibility – or incompatibility – of migrant integration and cultural distinctions" (2010:13). Moreover, transnationalism can be described as a condition where the physical international borders are liquefied due to the paradoxical virtual cross-border activities. Transnationalism, as a broader concept, refers to a wide range of practices which links migrants with their homeland.

International migrations rived the migrant families between their place of origin and destination, strengthening the emotional ties with the nation of origin. Even this strong bond with the homeland facilitates the chain of migrations. Thus, it is necessary to question the relationship between diaspora and transnationalism and how these two concepts juxtapose to represent the conflicts suffered by the migrant groups. The central connection between the two is that both are concerned with the continuous cross-border bonds, which include cross-cultural influences on the migrant's life. A strong relation between the home nation, defined as "referent-origin" (2008:3) by Dufoix and the place of destination, has been reflected through the engagement of diaspora and transnationalism. The transnational arguments emphasise the issues of integration of people with the host nation, whereas diaspora questions the cultural individuality of the migrant groups as well as the integration among them. Thus, as Cohen remarks, "in some limited circumstances, the term 'diaspora' can be used to describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility" (2008:8).

There are also some noteworthy distinctions between diaspora and transnationalism, as diaspora is most commonly related to religious, cultural, ethnic and national groups. In contrast, transnationalism is concerned with the nation-state despite its internal divergences. Thus, in this context, Faist refers that "transnational communities encompass diasporas, but not all transnational communities are diasporas" (2010: 21). The dimension of time is also a vital parameter to mark the distinction between these two; the term diaspora denotes a "multi-generational pattern" (Faist 2010:22), but transnationalism did not concern about the time span; instead deals with the recent mobility of the people. Moreover, in the context of the identity formation of migrant groups, diaspora as a conceptual framework focuses on the collective identity based on their culture of origin. Transnationalism, on the other hand, strictly focuses on the mobility of the people and on the basis of that, their identities are constructed, for example, Afro-American, Indo-British etc. The prefix 'trans' in the word 'transnational' refers to 'to go beyond', 'across', 'on the other side of', and the other part of the word 'national' originates from the Latin 'natio' or 'nation' meaning place, birth or race of people suggesting an abstract idea of common belonging of ethnic, cultural and linguistic commonality. Thus, transnationalism suggests a cross-border affiliation of the intangible notion of the nation-state, which gets appropriated to a concrete form with the connection of people. Furthermore, the cultural aspect of the diaspora is co-related with the idea of the nation-state; thus, the cross-cultural and cross-border affiliations problematise the identity of the migrant groups. This paper deals with the transnational engagement of diaspora and the intricacies of transnational identity.

3. THEATRE OF INDIAN DIASPORA

The literature of the Indian diaspora constitutes a well-established field of scholarly enquiry where its representation in theatre has not been explored much. Referring to the seminal work of Aparna Dharwadkar "Diaspora and the Theatre of the Nation" the marginalisation in representation of the theatre of diaspora in the mainstream narrative become more prominent. She notes that

while novelists often employ diaspora as the enabling condition but not the subject of narrative, immigrant playwrights can create original theatre only when they distance themselves from their cultures of origin and embrace the experience of residence in the host culture, with all its problems of acculturation and identity (2003: 303).

Despite of this neglect a significant and gradual progress is visible in the study of theatre by diaspora recognising its unique legitimacy as a mode of cultural representation embodying the lived experience of the migrant communities. Theatre as a performative practice coheres with specific social and historical context which elevates the individual experiences for diverse audience. The elevation of a specific context into the mould of performance to reach the audience is one of the theatre's many concerns. Theatre largely interrogates the metanarratives around the reception and production of political, economic and social traits, thus, providing a separate space to an individual playwright where a free flow of dialogue can exist with its uniqueness. As Gabriele Griffin argues, the contemporary stage has an increasingly utilised for shifting positionalities of diasporic subjects to represent the transformation of personal to collective displacement into impactful theatrical illustration (2003: 224-237).

The long-standing association of the South Asian population in European countries provides the essential ground for shaping Diasporic literature. Migration from South Asia to the United Kingdom is not a recent phenomenon. Instead, it has its history. Though the preliminary migration to the UK took place as the labour migration in the early 20th century, there were educational opportunities in England in the colonial era enabling a significant number of student migrations. Moreover, gradually skilled labour migration and the development of diaspora are noticed. The development of South-Asian theatre in the UK has come to attention mainly in the 1970s with the publication of Naseem Khan's report, and *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (1976), which brings the theatre production by minorities into focus. Though in English drama, the appearance of oriental characters like Aurangzeb, the great Mughal Emperor of India, in Dryden's play *Aureng-Zebe; or the Great Moghal* is evident, a parallel practice of adaptation of Indian text for the British stage can also be seen in the production of Sir William Jones's 1789 translation of *Sakuntala* in Latin and English. During World War I, a theatre group of Indians with leftist ideology in the UK has emerged, named the Indian Dramatic Art Society, which invoked the emergence of vernacular theatre in the UK (Bose 2009: 250). The vernacular theatres mainly represent the inter-communal consciousness about the existence of migrants in the foreign socio-cultural scenario. The steady progress in theatre practice by migrants gained notability as theatre groups like Asian Artistic Association and Maharashtrian Group Theatre in London; and The East-West Theatre Group in Birmingham started performing in vernacular tongues like Gujarat, Marathi, Bengali and Hindi.

Additionally, through theatre by diaspora remains separated from mainstream theatre, it gets a positive reception in the UK; as Ley and Dadswell mentions, "the primary reception of British South Asian theatre in all its varieties by audience and reviewers has not matched by an appropriate level of secondary reception by those who might review achievements at a greater distance, from an academic or critical standpoint" (2012:1). The strong cultural and national roots of the people of diaspora create a unique mix of home and host in the theatre, where the experience of migration and encountering the host society give birth to the theatre groups like -Tara Arts (1976), Tamasha (1986), Kali Theatres (1990), Man Mela (1993) and Vayu Naidu Company (2001). Moreover, playwrights in the UK such as Ruksana Ahmad, Hanif Kureish, Tariq Ali, Dolly Dhingra, Farrukh Dhondy, Tanika Gupta, Ayub Khan-Din, Rani Moorthy are significant figures in the South-Asian British theatre. The plays representing diasporic positionality frequently deals with the tension and cultural reproduction of migration. Plays like *Strictly Dandia* by Sudha Bhuchar, Sanjaeev Bhaskar's *Goodness Gracious Me*, Ayub Khan Din's *East is East* and *Rafita-Rafita*, *Borderlines* by Hanif Kureishi create a dialogue between the migrants and the host society. Rasa Theatre Group (1998-2000) notably staged the hybrid identity of the British Indians through plays like *Shades of Brown*, *Pooja*, and *Curry Tales* by Rani Murthy. Ruksana Ahmad's plays *Song for a Sanctuary* (1990), *Black Salwar* (1998), *Mistaken* (2001), and *Annie Besant in India* (2007) narrate the plight of women in a patriarchal society. Jatinder Verma's *A Ramayana Odyssey* (2001), Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behzti* (2004), Azma Dar's *Chaos* (2005), Jabine Chandri's *My Daughter's Trial* (2013) are some other prominent plays representing engagement of people of the diaspora in the new land. Furthermore, theatre historian Neilesh Bose observes that from the 1990s onwards, British society and mainstream media significantly started acknowledging the theatre production by South-Asian theatre groups in the UK (Bose 2009:495). The growing visibility marked a turning point and thus, from this period, plenty of theatre by the Indian diaspora started flourishing and producing plays regarding the many fold issues of race, ethnicity, culture, identity, transnational engagement and multiculturalism.

4. TANIKA GUPTA: INDO-BRITISH VOICE

Tanika Gupta was born in London on the 1st of December 1963, one year after her parents migrated to England from Calcutta. From childhood, she was acquainted with performance and theatre as she performed in 'The Tagoreans', her parent's cultural group, a dance drama by Rabindranath Tagore. She has done her graduations from Oxford University. In her early years, she worked for Asian women's refuge. Tanika also wrote the script for Television series like *Silver Street* and *Westwayin*. Over the years, she has done exceptional work as she wrote over twenty stage plays, thirty radio plays for BBC, and scripts for television series like *The Bill*, *Grange Hill* and *East Eanders*. Her major works include *Love'n Stuff*, *The Empress*, *Wah! Wah! Girls*, *Dreaming by Day*, *Meet the Mukherjees*, *White Boy*, *Fragile Land*, *Inside Out*, *Sanctuary*, *The Waiting Room* and many others. Her play *Inside Out* (2002) records racial abuse and a marginal, poverty-stricken family of two daughters and a single mother.

The early plays of her, *Skelton* and *The Waiting Room* are published by Faber and Faber, while the rest of her plays are published by Oberon Books. She received numerous awards for her works beginning with the nomination for EMMA Awards (Ethnic Minority Media Award 1999). She was offered John Whiting Award from The Arts Council of Great Britain for her play "The Waiting Room" in 2000. In 2003, she was awarded the Asian Women of Achievement Award in the arts and culture category. Next year she got a nomination for the Olivier award in the category of 'Outstanding Achievement' for her play *Fragile Land* and her adaptation of *Hobson's Choice*. She also has in her credit the Amnesty International Media Awards in 2005, the Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2008 and the BBC Audio Drama Awards in 2013. Some of her plays have created havoc on the multicultural British stage, where Tanika significantly posits herself as the voice of the hitherto neglected and marginalised sects and communities. One such example is her outspoken political play *Gladiator Games* (2005), which takes its source from a real-life incident of the killing of an Asian man in prison by his prison inmate. Tanika also reflects how a proportionate attempt has been made to two shades of the case from the public eye. That is also why the play revoked debate when it was first performed in Crucible Studio in October 2005. Tanika, with this docudrama, reflects the attitudes of government officials towards Black and Asian criminals and sometimes towards Muslims, which is the case for the present story. The present study, however, in the same vein, makes an enquiry of two of her plays, *Sanctuary* and *Fragile Land*, elaborately on the markers of the positionality of asylum seekers, the second-generation dilemma of cultural baggage and the gender nuances prevalent in the migrant community among others.

5. SANCTUARY: THE OASIS OF DISCOLOURED PAST

Sanctuary is Tanika Gupta's earliest play, which deals with, as Sierz remarks, "that most political of issues, national identity" (2012:10). Through a carefully constructed dialogue among the displaced individuals in the foreign land, Gupta, challenges the hyphenated identity imposed on migrant subjects not only through exploring the dilemma of South-Asian characters but also narrates the problematics of the nation in the context of British nationals. It was first performed at Loft Theatre, London, in the Lyttleton Transformation project of the National Theatre on 29th July 2002. Tanika Gupta's presence as a South-Asian playwright in the National Theatre asserts some key socio-political issues like migration, refugees, asylum seekers and, more importantly, a race that contemporary British society encounters. This play's characters represent life in the diaspora and challenge the complex web of nationalist identity. The title of the play 'sanctuary' suggests a refuge or safe pursuit; thus, this play narrates the painful stories of the asylum seekers. The play is mainly set in a graveyard decorated with flower plants and tubes of herbs which Gupta describes as 'Eden-like' (2002:5). This ironic paradise shelters asylum seekers with the kaleidoscopic promises of future. Kabir Sheikh, a middle-aged man from Kashmir, works there as a gardener in the churchyard and considers it as a safe 'home' as he mentions, "this is my home, my resting place. I am not wanting to lose it" (2002:12). His friend Michael Ruzindana, originally an African refugee, also finds peace there. The third protagonist introduced in this play is Sebastian Cruz, an Afro-Caribbean who is troubled by his brutal memories as a war photographer. In his review of the play, Paul Taylor remarks that "the biblical Eden predated the Fall, whereas the reconstituted paradise in Gupta's drama shelters a trio of people who have already seen hell" (Taylor cited in Sierz 2012: 11). The three protagonists embody the legacies of nation-state conflict marking the transnational displacement. Kabir escaped from his homeland after the brutal murdering of his wife; Michael a survivor of the Rwanda genocide was forced to partake into the mass killing; Sebastian carrying the dual identity have the scares of documentation of the inhuman incidents. The small but intriguing setup of the play introduces the few more characters capturing the idiosyncrasies of the socio-cultural boundaries. In this the next character in the play being make

known to is a priest in her thirties, Jenny Catchpole, who is very sensitive towards the other asylum seekers. Her grandmother Margaret, on the contrary, has a racist and conservative attitude. The last character in the play is a mixed-race girl Ayesha Williams who is in her teens and, unlike the other characters, has an optimistic understanding of life. These back stories exemplify the sphere of personal trauma which intertwines with transnational constructs of Britain. Thus, Griffin notes that

Sanctuary creates a diasporic space in the graveyard and church grounds which act as the site for multi-cultural encounter, simultaneously exploding any idea that the experience of war and violation is specific to one nation, one site, one history, and suggesting that the displacements generated by political conflict create new and fragile micro-communities which remain haunted by their diverse pasts. (Griffin 2003:228)

The reading of the play underscore the idea of essential national identity, as the graveyard acts like a ground to negotiate belonging and identity beyond fixed boundaries. Further the idea of 'sanctuary' marks trauma narrative from a broader spectrum to engage with the political, and historical narrative of horror, and suffering. Thus, it reflects upon the individual, and collective memory of the idealised past as well as the contradiction of it with the hope of stable future within the conciliated boundaries of nation-state.

Gupta's play *Sanctuary* centres on the experiences of war which made the three main characters- Michael Ruzindana, Sebastian Cruz and Kabir Sheikh, question the notion of the nation-state. The space Gupta creates here is not a non-definite zone; rather, from the description of the incidents, one can understand that the play is set in 21st-century Britain. Gupta strongly points to the harrowing war experience and critically narrates the transnational affiliation of the migrants. The asylum seekers in this play are all in different contexts, the victims of the violence perpetrated by their native land. Even to avoid the atrocities of vehemence, these three characters leave their homeland and settle in a foreign land. Kabir is settled in this asylum after a dreadful incident in Kashmir where her wife was gang-raped and killed by the invaders while he was trying to save her daughter-

I should have been saving my wife, I should have been giving my life for her. I can never be returning to my birthplace, never facing my daughter because of the shame. What sort of a terrible man am I being? (2002:57)

This incident shattered his life and filled him with contempt for his own nation. Though his journey to Britain was involuntary, he readily accepts his transnational existence. Kabir is here portrayed not as a person who ossifies his culture and upholds the orthodox beliefs but because of his violent experience in his home-land he is very much open to the other culture.

Another character Michael is another victim of the war as he encounters the civil war between the Tutsi and Hutu populations. He was a Hutu priest and killed several Tutsi people as the regiment ordered him. Michael, without his will, arranged his church as the refuge to the three thousand miserable Tutsi people as they threatened him, and when his clan found out about this, he was ordered to kill them; as Michael says to Kabir,

I had no choice. Truly. The militia wanted me to help them. Every day, they came to my house, they threatened me. They had already slaughtered my wife. They kept saying that if I did not help them, they would do the same to me and Charles [i.e. his son]. I was afraid. I had to live on my wits – to save my son's life. Violence feeds on violence, like a fire. People went mad and killed and killed and killed. (2002:80)

The most striking fact is that he is a strong racist as he not only murders the Tutsis but also rapes the women of that community as he opposes their community racially. Nevertheless, he accepts the transnational identity he carries in Britain as a migrant. Therefore, Griffin, in the book *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain*, rightly remarks that "Michael is able to live with his past in ways that Kabir cannot. Where Michael uses ideological position, his racial prejudices, to exculpate himself from his deeds, Kabir is haunted by his failure to help his wife as she was raped and murdered" (2003:229). Further, Michael's idea of racism along with his opinion to acquit his crime highlights the sharp contrast with Kabir's haunting past embodying the guilt of not able to save his family. Thus, Griffin notes "Michael is able to live with his past in ways that Kabir cannot" (2003:229). The act of Kabir killing Michael is thus, not because of the racial difference rather reverberates Kabir ethical consideration for the victims of genocide. Kabir action is the symbolical representation of his past failure to protect his family. Therefore, when Kabir comes to know that Micheal thinks of his deeds as the justified action, he kills him as if correcting the past. The proclamation of Jenny after the tragic ebullition of Kabir, "Justice has been done" (Gupta 2002:87) comprehensively represents the incident and Margaret's reluctance towards the same underscores the complex negotiation of diasporic micro-communities. Margaret supports

Jenny as she exclaims that Kabir has already suffered because of his experience in Kashmir and agrees to cover up the crime.

Another point that needs discussion on transnational identity is Ayesha's character as she manifests hybridity and generational conflict. Her father passed away five years ago, so she regularly attends the graveyard. On the contrary, once rich in the colonial industry, Margaret believes that a woman should get married at the right age and opposes her granddaughter Jenney's priesthood; Ayasha believes in individuals' freedom and life choices. As she has cross-cultural affiliations from her childhood because of her parent's different ethnic belonging, she represents the contemporary multicultural UK. From a conversation between Ayesha and Margaret it is apparent:

MARGARET. I've been meaning to ask you, Ayesha, where exactly are you from?

AYESHA. Just down the road – Stanley Road. You know it?

MARGARET. No, I mean originally?

AYESHA. I was born in Battersea.

MARGARET. (Seeing as she's getting nowhere.) And before that?

AYESHA. Before my birth?

MARGARET. Your parents dear – where are they from?

AYESHA. Dad was English and Mum's from Turkey – a little town outside Istanbul.

Actually, Dad wasn't really English. His dad was Scottish – that's my grandfather and my grandmother's half Irish and a quarter Norwegian and a quarter something else ...

MARGARET. Quite a mix and match in your family then. (2002:42)

Ayesha's life is characterised by transnational affiliation; as Griffin points out, "Ayesha represents a new generation of migrant figures for whom diaspora is a permanently lived reality, for whom travel is an option rather than a necessity" (2003:231). Even Billington, in his review of the play, appreciates it by saying that Gupta uses "the stage to rub our noses in global reality" (Billington 2002). Moreover, *Sanctuary* generates a diasporic space where different national identities come into contact with their respective histories. Sierz, in the introduction of the book *Tanika Gupta: Political Plays*, mentions that "in *Sanctuary*, Gupta explores that most political of issues, national identity" (Sierz 2012:2). In this play, the abstract idea of the nation becomes more fragile when it comes into contact with the other and creates a new one.

What lingers upon the audience after the final curtain falls is not the resolution or the new path rather a quietness which suggests the unsettling and contested space of the sanctuary. Gupta negates to mark the graveyard to become a metaphor for multicultural harmony instead she portrayed it as the ground of celebration for collective memories of Kashmiri, Rwandan and Afro-Caribbean, who refuse to say buried beneath the socio-political space of Britain. Gupta's multicultural pot makes the audience confront the collisions within this concentrated space reconnoitring belongingness. The play and the characters not only represent the failure of the multicultural space but makes us confront a deeper reality that the socio-cultural stretch of Britain reckons belonging and national identity in terms of homogeneous past; thus, the idea of true sanctuary is here fractured. Lastly, the quietness after the curtains fall leaves the question upon true sanctuary as it is only possible when nation itself acknowledges the heterogeneity of histories. In this sense, *Sanctuary* is less a plea for inclusion than a forensic examination of the limits of inclusion itself, one that leaves the audience standing among the graves, wondering whose Eden this land was ever meant to be.

6. FRAGILE LAND: THE REALM OF FRACTURED DREAMS

In contrast to *Sanctuary*, which presents the life of asylum seekers in England, *Fragile Land* deals with more complex convergences of British-South Asian identities. Gupta here juxtaposes different religions, ethnicities and nationalities under the same roof. The play presents the South-Asian characters and engages more with the diasporic space by introducing the British characters. It was first performed at the Hampstead Theatre of London on March 12, 2003. *Fragile Land* concentrates upon second-generation teenage British-South Asians who confront inter-generational conflicts. In the play, the discussions among the teenage boys and girls bring forth the contemporary issues of race, ethnicity, politics and, more prominently, the transnational identity of the migrants in the UK. Tanika Gupta's *Fragile Land* seems to be a more active account of transnational identity and the hyphenated existence of the migrants. This staging of the

hyphenated existence resonates what Elisabeth Lechner mark as the contested site of daily cultural encounters. Lechner notes,

She (Gupta) presents intercultural communication and the overcoming of stereotypes via getting to know the character of a person instead of jumping to conclusions about him or her as the path to a more diverse, peaceful and multicultural (in its most positive meaning) co-existence of different cultural communities in Britain's vibrant capital. (2013: 52)

The construction of identity is thus here a result of the conflict with the community as well as within the larger British society.

Fragile Land speaks for the destiny of five British-born South-Asian characters- Laksmi (Lux), Tasleema (Tas), Quasim, Omar and Hassan. The two female characters, Laksmi and Tasleema, experience a sense of freedom in British society compared to the rigidity their family expects them to be. They both want to finish their education and lead an independent life which is not allowed in their communities. On the contrary, Quasim and Omar reject the transnational affiliation and want to keep their homeland practices and religious beliefs stringently. The play is primarily set in an Indian sweet shop dealing centrally with immigration and cultural conflicts of the diaspora. Thus, the play, at the same time, celebrates the transnational identity of the migrants and also criticises the hyphenated existence of the people of the diaspora.

The cross-cultural affiliation of Lakshmi and Tasleema causes inter-generational conflict, which problematises their transcultural identities. Their existence as British Asians gets hurdled by their parents' conservative outlook towards British society. Both of them are prevented from associating with the people outside their community and condemned to follow the rules set by their own communities. Tasleema, whose parents are from Bangladesh, considers herself a British national as she was born and raised in this 'foreign' land. She is now seventeen and waiting for her next birthday when she will be eighteen and an adult to take her own decision. She has a great interest in her studies but fears her father might find it incorrigible.

LUX: ...you're dead clever Tas. You could be anything you wanna be- a doctor, a nurse-I dunno -even a professor... your dad wouldn't give up all that glory, would he?

TAS: You're forgetting one thing.

LUX: What?

TAS: It does not count if you are a girl. ... The cleverer you are, the more difficult it is to find a husband. That's what my dad says. (Gupta 2003:11)

The inter-generational conflict encountered by the two female characters is the source of another shade of cultural dislocation, which problematises their hybrid existence as British Asians. Both of their families want them to perform their native cultural practices in order to preserve their cultural roots. Tasleema's sister Naz had rejected an imposed marriage and ran off with her white boyfriend giving her Abba a rigorous feeling of not 'produce[ing] one obedient daughter' (Gupta 2003:10). Though he tries to control his daughter's activities by locking her up, Tas sneaks out with excuses to see Hassan, her friend. When Tas's father learns about her daughter's disobedience, he plans to send her back to Bangladesh. The effort to limit transnational and transcultural ties is evident as Tas's father believes in the singularity of identity. Although her friend Lux reminds her that such action is illegal, Tas points out: "That won't make no difference to Abba. According to him, until I'm married, I'm his property... Abba'll just marry me off to get rid of me - then he won't have any women to worry about" (Gupta 2003: 25). Smart and ambitious, Tas rejects dual heritage and chooses Britain over her father's native country Bangladesh, as, according to her, Britain offers greater agency to women. Bangladesh, a country she has never visited and known to her through her father's eyes, bears only opposing alliances of imposed marriages and domestic slavery. Thus, for Tas the transnational ties with the homeland are a form of delimiting women's agency.

Omar and Quasim are of similar minds and provide the definition of dignity and culture. They considered themselves the protector as well as the representative of their culture. Though their family belong to two nations, migration makes them identify with each other based on religion. Omar addresses Quasim as his brother, and on the objection of Tas that 'he is not your brother', he replies that though they are not bound in blood relation but are part of 'Muslim Brethren'. Thus, these two characters signify the conventional mindset as they claim that "united we stand to protect our sister". They want to be a part of the United Kingdom because of its opportunities but do not wish to accept the change in culture. They are ready to be 'hyphenated' considering nationality but will not be prepared to compromise the arbitrary notion

of race, culture and identity. They suggest that women “should stick to” their “own kind” as women are more responsive to carry the culture. Omar further suggests his strong detachment as he proposes, “don’t want no dilution of the race”. Into this, Lux and Tas both significantly differ from him as they question the supremacy of race in transnational spaces like the UK-

TAS: What race?

QUASIM: The Asian posse race.

LUX: Half-wit.

OMAR: You lot fuck about with White boys and we’ll all disappear. Impure blood- don’t want that do we? Lose everything then- our identity, respect, culture.

LUX: ... It’s not okay for us to have White boyfriends but it’s okay for you to sniff around every blond slag you can get yours filthy paws on.

OMAR: It’s different innit?

TAS: How’s it different?

OMAR: You are the mother of the future. (2003:15)

Nira Yuval-Davis while writing about women and transcultural space argues that “women are constructed as the symbolic bearer of the collectivity’s identity and honour, both personally and collectively” (2003:45). Quasim, who defines the concepts of purity and dignity of a culture in a very orthodox manner, ironically has an English mother who converted to Islam after marriage.

Laksmi, whose parents are from South India, is a comparatively strong voice in the play who constantly denies the subjugation of women and symbolises hope for a better life leaving all cultural prejudices behind. She is Tasleema’s best friend and counters her submissive nature. Though she negates the oppressive nature of culture towards women, she never forgets her heritage and cultural lineage. She believes in freedom but does not want to disrespect her parents. She knows her parents will not accept her relationship with a White person outside the community. As second-generation migrant, Lux and Tas are open to the changes in the ways of life in Britain and mocks their parent’s outlook. In a particular case, Lux talks about her parents, that “they are still living in the dark ages- forgotten that the world and the human race have moved on” (Gupta 2003:20). The culture which freezes itself within a specific time becomes stagnant and stops evolving, resulting in a dead practice that is very much prominent in Lux’s words. It is the nature of tradition to evolve and grow with time, but Gupta here presents the conflict of first-generation migrants who like to carry their past and freezes their presence within it. Such generational clashes reflect the broader dynamics of cultural; negotiation in British-Asian communities, where the women belonging to the second-generation of migrants often experience enormous burden of representing and transmitting communal identity and belongingness.

However, the characterisation of Quasim, Omar and Hassan present the duality of national identity. The most penetrating sense of displacement is observed with the male characters in the play, who have discarded Western society for their socio-religious beliefs. The queries regarding belonging, home and nationality are uniquely represented through the character of Omar. He is a migrant from Bangladesh residing with his uncle. As a teenager trying to cope with his migrant identity, Omar’s negotiation with his hybrid identity is complicated because of his separation from his family. He ponders that neither he nor this country accepted the other. He ironically compares himself with a ‘suitcase’, “full of amazing things that used to belong to someone. But like, I [he] got lost on a flight and now I’m [he’s] shunted from one airport to another. No one wants to claim me [him] and no one wants to open me [him]. An unwanted piece of baggage full of wonderful possibilities” (2003:31). The continuous struggle for existence as well as finding identity, is what made Omar furious. He parallels himself with an inanimate object that does not contain any will. For him, England is a conundrum with hidden racism. When Fidel mentions to him that “it’s a free country” Omar answers back saying “may be for you white boys but it ain’t for us” (2003:60). He even foretells the future as he describes the racist attitude in the job prospects, “What? End up working in a factory for peanuts?... They’ve all written us off. Who’s gonna give a Paki boy with no qualifications a job in this city? It’s bad enough when you do have letters after your name. We gotta be better than them” (2003:64). His staunch belief into which he validates his action of controlling women’s sexuality also broods over the hybrid formation of mixed races being an offence against culture and religious faiths.

Whereas Omar rejects the hybrid identity, mixed-race Quasim is stuck between two cultures. Quasim, in this respect, presents the most disturbing sight of the dual heritage. In a dream, Quasim reveals the inadequacies of the transnational identity over an Indian sweet shop where the ladoos and samosas censure him:

FIRST LADOO: Problem with you Quasim is your half and half innit?

SECOND LADOO: Impure blood.

THIRD LADOO: Only thing about you that's Muslim is your name.

QUASIM: I'm trying.

FIRST SAMOSA: Oh, he's trying.

SECOND SAMOSA: You're a dilution of the original, a pale copy.

THIRD SAMOSA: No one really wants you. The English think you look weird and the Muslims think you're a fake.

QUASIM: I ain't a fake. I'm the new blood. The future belongs to people like me – mixed races, dual identity, double heritage... (2003:49-50)

To have a contrasting image of cultural duality, Gupta places Hassan, an Afghani asylum-seeker, in the play. Hassan witnessed the execution of his mother, suffered a troublesome situation, and, in the end, escaped from the hands of Talibans to Germany and then to England. As an illegal immigrant, his nationality, as well as his identity, is literally in limbo. He and his father cannot afford to return to their home country because of its violent and war-torn state. Unlike Quasim and Omar, Hassan believes "London is a city of opportunity" (2003:30). When Omar and Quasim criticise the concept of multiculturalism and transnational identity, Hassan mentions that "you don't know how lucky you are" (2003:63). He is a victim of war and senses terror that's why he likes this place and is ready to negotiate his life here. Hassan is driven by his wish to utilise the second chance he has attained because of migrating to Britain; thus, he says, "maybe we expected too much of it. Maybe we should be so angry and try and change it" (2003:64). Nevertheless, ironically, he was deported and sent back to Afghanistan because of Tsleema's refusal of his marriage proposal, which would provide him with permanent status in the UK. Moreover, Hassan dreams about his deportation, leading to his mother's death. Thus, Hassan's nationality is in question as he thinks he belongs to the UK, but his passport expired, and he wants not to be in Afghanistan because of its war-torn situation. The portrayal of displacement and the fractured belonging accentuates the ambivalent positionality of the migrants as "they explore the diasporic space in order to redefine what it means to be of Black or Asian origin in Britain today" (Salusso 2020:76).

7. CONCLUSION

In *Sanctuary*, the characters negotiate their identities as British-South Asian or Black-British through a detailed intervention of their respective pasts. The play *Sanctuary* concludes on a curiously hopeful note as Margaret initiates Michael's burial to save Kabir from imprisonment. The final scene presents a reformed Margaret who converses with Ayesha and hands her the diamond Kabir found in Michael's grave, which enables her to fulfil her dream of travelling around the world. Through the representation of redemptions in the character of Margaret, Gupta dramatizes the possibility of change in the attitude of the whites where Ayesha embodies the post-colonial hybrid identity. The transnational identity of the characters makes them more feasible to transformation and fosters a nuanced understanding of nationalities questioning the boundaries of nation-state binaries. By accommodating different ethnic groups into one stage Gupta breaks the lens of the margin and the centre.

On the other hand, *Fragile Land* scrutinises hybridity as a disruptive phenomenon where one is compelled to choose between nations. The transnational conception of diaspora encounters rejection of the 'other'. This play also points out the gender biases in the social structure where women are treated as commodities. Gupta here criticises the conservative attitude and promotes freedom of choice. For Tas and Lux, the communal surrounding is very much oppressive, but the young men in the play find refuge in the idealisation of the cultural heritage. Thus, *Fragile Land* brings forth the conflicts in the diasporic communities pertaining to race, culture, religion and heritage.

Considering together the plays of Gupta, *Sanctuary* and *Fragile Land* as representative of a fraction of contemporary British society, illuminate the complex and contradictory realities of diasporic space. Where the one play gestures towards the cross-cultural understanding and marks the possibilities of hybridity, the other exposes the cost of it in terms of generational fracture. Gupta successfully states the tension of belonging in both the plays to navigate the archives of the South-Asian genealogy in Britain and its contemporary face visible through the second and consequent generation

of migrants. The presence of these dichotomies ultimately reveals that the idea of belonging is fails to be static rather is a continuous process of precarious negotiation in the transnational space of Inian diaspora.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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