

## Interpolating South Asian Spaces and Transnational Habitation in Tanuja Desai Hidier's *Born Confused*

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### ABSTRACT

*While there is an exhaustive list of literature produced by diasporic South Asian writers that voices a multitude of concerns for both men and women of this descent, the voice that speaks to the South Asian young adult needs to be highlighted and explored in detail. This is especially crucial as the majority of metropolitan young adult texts are largely Eurocentric in nature. Novels with themes that appeal to a young reader with subject matter consistent with the age, experiences and challenges of the young adult and with a young non-white protagonist are rare. This paper introduces a South Asian Diasporic Metropolitan Young Adult text to investigate how it can interpolate into the consciousness of the Metropolitan diasporic South Asian young reader as well as into the western narrative space. This is done by focusing on the ways in which South Asian elements of place, history, and allegory interpolate into the narrative space of Tanuja Desai Hidier's young adult novel, **Born Confused** (2002). The ultimate aim of this paper is to show that South Asian Diasporic Metropolitan Young Adult Literature can play a role in interpolating transnational heritage by creating an awareness of cultural heritage on familiar young adult grounds and decenter Eurocentric narrative discourses.*

*Keywords: transnationalism; interpolation; young adult; South Asian diaspora; Eurocentric; diasporic consciousness.*

### INTRODUCTION

Fiction writers make choices as to what they introduce and these decisions cannot be lightly dismissed as they can have a lasting impact in the minds of readers especially non-discerning young readers. As a social product, fiction has the power and potential to 'produce' society because of its normative effect on the young. As authors and educators, we need to be discerning in choosing the right literature and it is vital for us to engage in cultural diversity. In this study, we explore the creative art of Metropolitan Diasporic South Asian writers, who through their writing create a space for young adults of South Asian descent to discover their place in society.

A survey of popular young adult fiction that is on the bestseller list in major bookshops not only in Europe and the United States, but also Asia indicate the preference for books mainly written by western Metropolitan authors. These books deal with subject matter that appeals to the younger crowd such as fantasy, romance, sex, horror, teen drama and so forth and are readily devoured as teen culture by young adults. The engagement with these reading materials is further strengthened and popularised by the media and the film industry. A good example would be the *Harry Potter Series* by J K Rowling, *The Twilight Series* by Stephanie Meyer and *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The engagement primarily with only metropolitan texts and the power and influence wielded by these books have far reaching effects on the non-discerning reader, more so in the young reader. Would we then

find a nexus of power forming within the core of the body of creative works that are presented to and cater for young adult readers? Do primary bookstores partake in the resistance, whether consciously or unconsciously, to dismantle these pillars that are formed predominantly by Eurocentric, reading material? We must note here that we speak of the reading material that exists in the English language and that the reading community that we refer, are those who read in the English Language. How would this impact on the ideological formations within young adult minds? In short, are we dealing with a canon of Young Adult Literature that is Eurocentric in nature, with its embedded ideological traditions and values?

The above argument leads to the aim of this paper which is to determine how diasporic young adult fiction by South Asian writers can interject into Eurocentric discourses and create transnational awareness in the youth of South Asian diaspora. Change is a difficult time in every child going through adolescence and is normally a time where there is an adjustment phase filled with anticipation, anxiety maybe even fear in some. During this phase between childhood and adulthood most young adults are aware enough to be conscious of the process and it is comforting to be able to find understanding, reassurance and the company of those who can share their mutual experience and feelings. These can actually be found in good stories for young adults. While there are a number of variations on the definition of young adult fiction, the general consensus is that young adult literature is fiction written, published for and marketed to adolescents and young adults. Young Adult Literature, as defined by Tomlinson is “Literature written for young people age eleven to eighteen and books marketed as “young adults” by a publisher.”(1998, p. 4) It is also generally noted that while literature for young adults share similar features with literature from other genres of fiction, the content and context would be in a style that appeals more readily to a younger crowd as the protagonist is normally a young person and the subject matter and themes are consistent with the age, experiences and challenges of the young adult.

With regard to the South Asian Diaspora, even though there is a burgeoning body of literature from this now rather significant global community, Young Adult Literature is a space that has not been fully interrogated. Hence, while there in an exhaustive list of literature produced by diasporic South Asian writers that voices a multitude of concerns for both men and women of this descent, the voice that speaks to the South Asian young adult needs to be highlighted and explored in detail.

As far as definitions are concerned, South Asian Young Adult Literature is the body of literature produced by metropolitan diasporic South Asian writers who have settled and made a new home for themselves in the various corners of the world. The subject matter or issues that would appeal to a young adult have seldom or never been addressed by the majority of the South Asian diasporic writers and this is an area that is lacking and needs to be addressed. Being children of diasporic parents, these South Asian young adults could belong to second or third generation members of the community and they will face issues that diasporic people generally face. Some of these concerns would be around ‘home and belonging’, ‘inter-generational conflicts’, ‘cultural conflicts’ and ‘issues relating to their unique identities’. Literature could be one way to approach these issues from different angles. How would one talk about these issues in a way that would appeal to the young reader? How can difficult subject matters be presented in a content that is familiar to a young person’s worldview? How can adolescent concerns be intertwined with other more serious issues to make it more palatable to the young reader? These will be some of the key components that scholars who write for these particular members of the community need to address. Young adult fiction that reflects a familiar world and culture has the immense potential to address and analyse complex dynamics-family, relationships, tradition, social class, poverty, and gender roles. Instead of passively looking at mirror images of their experiences, they will be

equipped to engage in looking through many and varied windows so they can recognise the universality of the human condition and learn valuable lessons about optimism and resiliency.

Stories have always held the power to guide and influence their readers and listeners and, moreover teens often lack the tools or the cultural context to view works in a critical light. For diasporic South Asian young adult readers who look for versions of themselves and the issues of diasporic existence, there are none among the popular western texts mentioned earlier. Wouldn't they benefit from reading books that have young adults concerns such as everyday issues that teens struggle with in their daily lives; the pains of growing up, dealing with family breakdowns, in addition to living in multiethnic spaces; the issues of diasporic existence, of generational conflicts that deal with two notions of a 'home', and other similar themes?

To explore this possibility we need to look at various diasporic South Asian writers and the kinds of materials they use in their works. It is with this in mind that the ensuing discussion draws on the Metropolitan South Asian Young adult text *Born Confused* (2002) written by a diasporic South Asian writer, Tanuja Desai Hidier.

### INTERPOLATION AS A TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Building from Bill Ashcroft's concept of interpolation (2001), the focus is on the transformation of metropolitan spaces through interpolation of South Asia in the South Asian Metropolitan Diasporic texts and how they harness transnational habitation. The key focus is on how interpolation has a counter-discursive agency and how as a tool and a strategy, has the capacity to interpose, to intervene and interject into dominant discourses. The paper will first show how interpolation of South Asian elements slowly transforms the metropolitan space through the various modes of expression, mainly within the parameters of place/history, language/allegory and habitation/horizon. Then it will demonstrate how these interpolations lead to a more transnational habitation and how this creates transnational consciousness and awareness in the reader. The first broad category is Place and History, which will cover the scope of issues surrounding the concept of place and historiography. Place would be defined as not limited only to physical space but how it differs from 'space' or 'location'. How the idea of home as a place is conceived, remembered and is closely tied to the idea of one's identity. We will look at how the metropolitan spaces get transformed through the subtle interpolation of a South Asian worldview. Using place as the mode of expression the analysis is on how other related elements of South Asian consciousness such as culinary, religious and cultural practices interpolate within the established metropolitan spaces that the protagonists navigate in the text.

We will examine how language is an important tool for interpolation to occur. The theoretical position on Language and Allegory emphasises the acts of writing and reading as social and something that can be easily manipulated, appropriated and transformed. This includes how the dominant language is modified to a certain extent and utilised to convey ideas and terminology that are localised and also how meaning becomes defined because it is used to convey and present aspects of a previously dominated culture. Allegory becomes a site where cultural struggle takes place for allegory defines aspects of a culture in the form of cultural practices, myths and folklore that defines the culture itself. The non-mainstream writers will be able to interpolate the dominant discourses by intertwining their texts with the rich cultural allegories, myths and folk lore from their own culture, educating the young reader on the rich culture of their own ancestral heritage. Similarly, under the broad umbrella of Habitation and Horizon, we examine aspects in the selected texts of instances where habitation is reconfigured, to demonstrate a more transnational way of inhabiting space. Our

aim in this section is to analyse how interpolation through the expressive modes of habitation and horizon has the greatest potential for transformation to take place. Habitation describes a way of being in place, for a subject has the capacity to incorporate any influences into a sense of place, to appropriate resources and establish and confirm an identity. Using both the concepts of habitation and horizon, we will demonstrate how the protagonist who feels a sense of alienation at the beginning of the text goes through a transformation facilitated by the various interpolations that occur through place, history, language, allegory and is finally able to merge both inheritances, adopt a transnational habitation and is able to appreciate the third space she finds herself in.

### INTERPOLATING SOUTH ASIA INTO METROPOLITAN AMERICAN SPACES: *BORN CONFUSED*

This young adult novel is about a seventeen-year old South Asian American young girl who lives in New Jersey, America. Living in between two cultural spaces, the metropolitan and the South Asian, the story revolves around finding her identity while living in these spaces. Her home is where her parents maintain and practice the culture of their homeland, a space where she feels 'Indian' but in the metropolitan spaces such as school and other public spaces she feels displaced because of her heritage. While negotiating both the spaces and the two opposing cultures is the central theme, other concerns common to a young teen which is prevalent in this text are relationship, friendships, family and self-identity all of which run parallel to the main story. We will examine the various spaces that the protagonist negotiates and how they are constructed, beginning with the metropolitan space of school and the eventual transition into the domestic space of home.

The novel begins with the school space, as the protagonist gets ready to begin her summer break. She looks around her and realises how different she is from the rest of the students at the High School in New Jersey.

I didn't have to struggle for spy status. Fortunately I have this gift for invisibility, which comes in handy when you're trying to take sneaky peeks at other people's lives, considering I'm one of only two Indians in the whole school. The other being Jimmy (Trilok Singh) who wore his ethnicity so brazenly, in the form of that pupil-shrinking turban and the silver kada bangle on his wrist, we got the feeling many people had stopped noticing that I hailed originally from the same general hood. But I did my best to play it down. After all, the day I wore my hair in braids everyone yelled Hey, Pocahontas and did that ah-h-baah-baah-baah lip-slap at recess. (Hidier 2002, p.4)

This passage describes the western metropolitan space of a High School in New Jersey and the protagonist clearly experiences a feeling of alienation being a minority in a mainly white setting. Her isolation stems from the difference she sees between herself, the 'other' Indian and the rest of the students who are Caucasian/white American. She is very aware of the fact that she shares the same ethnicity with the 'other' Indian who seems to be wearing his ethnicity 'brazenly', seen in his headdress and the 'kada' bangle, which identifies him as a Sikh Punjabi, also a South Asian. Dimple, the protagonist's sense of non-belonging can be traced through her admission that she could be 'invisible' suggesting a deep sense of alienation and a desire to belong and assimilate with the mainstream.

The two South Asian young adults interpolate this western setting of school by their presence especially the South Asian boy who very much sticks to the customs of his home culture which is evident in the cultural markers in the passage. This is the first entry point where South Asian elements interpolate into an otherwise all white western space. In a text which very much sounds western based on the setting, a South Asian protagonist is

introduced, given a significant placing at the center stage and it is her voice that we hear throughout the novel as the main protagonist. This signals the South Asian interpolation into the American western setting.

Once entering the space of home the protagonist is immediately enveloped into a sense of being South Asian. The South Asian family home is a space where the family upkeep the tradition, culture and religion brought from the homeland. As is the norm the space that is mentioned almost immediately is the kitchen space where the culinary space is also appropriated to represent the South Asian culinary heritage.

The following passage shows how food takes on a nostalgic significance not unlike those in cultural narratives suffused with memories and imagined returns to the homeland. For the young protagonist who walks into the kitchen space immediately after being in the metropolitan school space, the culinary space inhabited by the parents is a place of comfort, a place that offers the known as well as the familiar. As such the language of food offers a portal to ethnic history, culture and roots within the kitchen space where displaced individuals meet and re-establish identities and communities. In this text the following scene greets the protagonist,

My mother was standing before the stove, stirring a huge pot. From the milky-sweet newborn scent I knew it was kheer-my favorite Indian dessert, rice pudding, basically, with saffron and cardamom, a pistachio crown. (Hidier 2002, p.72)

The cultural signifiers seen in the spices and the kind of cuisine that is prepared within the kitchen space is evident from this passage. The transformation from a metropolitan space to a South Asian space immediately occurs the moment the protagonist shifts from the school space and walks into her home.

The cultural heritage seen through the setup of the altar at the kitchen which showcases Indian deities reflect the cultural symbols that has been brought from the homeland. The father is depicted in the act of prayer, practicing the Hindu religion of worshipping deities “organised” according to the holy Hindu scriptures.

My father was beside her, praying to Saraswati. That was my goddess, the one he focused on to make his prayer for me. (He'd organised all the deities like this, being in the medical profession he was a practitioner of specialization) (Hidier 2002, p. 73)

Here is a good example of how South Asian Indian elements interpolate into the western space in New Jersey, America. We find a home where the Indian tradition is preserved and maintained and the family has appropriated the western space into South Asian space. The space is recognizably Indian, filled with cultural objects and memorabilia from the home country. The domestic space in the kitchen shows off many Indian signifiers from the kind of food that is being cooked to the pictures of Indian deities that adorn the walls. All these South Asian elements come together to present an Indian home, though very much located in the heart of an American city the space is clearly South Asian.

The text begins like any other text where the young protagonist comes home from school cherishing the idea of it being the last day of school with the summer holidays looming ahead. Reading on however one discovers the difference from this text to a normal western authored one, this is a story about a South Asian young adult who is the protagonist and one of the settings where the story takes place is the home of a South Asian family.

The South Asian presence in the home is further enhanced by the arrival of a relative from India who is currently studying in New York University. Here, the relative is a cousin, Kavita who had come to America to pursue further education but because of her upbringing in India she still holds on very much to the culture and customs of the homeland.. She invites Dimple, the protagonist to a conference in NYU (New York University) where the topic is on

South Asian Culture and is responsible in many ways for the re-orientation of the young Dimple into the South Asian culture. This creates the slow interpolation of South Asian cultural sensibilities into the western oriented mind of the protagonist as can be gleaned from the following passage which highlights Kavita's arrival in their home,

As we walked through the house, Kavita exclaimed delightedly at all sorts of things I'd long stopped noticing: a thigh-high vase blinking with peacock feathers in the foyer, the sandalwood chariot with the miniature Krishna and Arjuna...She stopped at the edge of a hand woven rug....-Bapray! I remember when you bought this (addressing Dimple's mother)-you signed it here, the Kashmiri storekeeper's way of assuring you the rug later shipped was indeed the chosen one. (Hidier 2002, p. 89)

The objects and paraphernalia that bespeak Indian culture as seen through Kavita's eyes are important. Her eyes seem to immediately pick out all the Indian objects and she gives a short commentary on each as if relieving some memory from the past. This is in line with what Stuart Hall (1990) defines cultural identity as, "a shared culture" and a collective "one true self" (223) which is not defined by a particular location but in the cross juncture of ancestral roots, history, tradition and culture. Through Kavita's keenness in observing all the cultural paraphernalia on display in the home space, South Asian culture interpolates into the western metropolitan space of New Jersey, America.

Here the protagonist does not make the trip to the ancestral land but the ancestral home is brought into the private space of their home through Kavita who had lived in India and is more 'Indian' than the young protagonist. This helps re-emphasise and reinforce the ties the diasporic young person already has with the homeland and the text echoes this sentiment to a larger audience through interpolating into the reading space of readers across the globe.

An example of how the South Asian minorities are able to interject into the vast American or western space is exemplified in the following passage. Urged by Gwyn, both young adults decide to check out the Indian neighborhood at Jackson Heights, Queens.

As in India, there were people, people everywhere: women in brilliant saris and yellow gold with thin knit cardigans and sometimes socks stuffed into toe-looped chappals, plucking up half-price jars of ghee and even frozen food (I was amazed at all of the idlee and dosa TV dinners you could find here)...alleys hectic with Hindi movie posters, the long-haired elaborately dressed actresses half-heartedly running from men at their sari tails,..a paan maker with black teeth rolling the icy thandak in betel nut leaves that my mother said my father used to hoard in his mouth like a hamster in India. (Hidier 2002,p.157)

The above description is abundant with signifiers of all traits of the South Asian culture, from, 'idlee', 'dosas', 'ghee' 'paan', 'thandak' (names of various Indian food which is an indication of the South Asian culinary space occupied), Hindi movie posters (signifier of South Asian cultural production), clothing, 'sari', 'chappal', (Indian clothing and footwear) are all indication of the cultural space that has been adopted in the western space of 'Queens', New Jersey. This presents how the metropolitan space has been adapted and interpolated with the many facets of the South Asian culture and heritage. This also demonstrates how the actual homeland has been replicated in many multiple sites where space has been transformed into place just by the way it is owned and lived in.

While the original home is replicated in the homes that the diasporic people live in, memories of the home the way it was left behind or memories of the people who still live there also becomes a space the diasporic young frequently visit. For Dimple, the ancestral home is tied in with the memories of her grandfather and her aunt, fondly referred to as "Meera masi". Though the memory is hazy and seems far off, it is always a place that she revisits, a place that has deep comfort to her sense of being. These memories are probably

experienced in many diasporic young as their homeland is a vague place that they had left when they were young and therefore a distant memory that is normally associated with parents and grandparents exist. Texts that bridge the gap between both these worlds would appeal to the young adult's worldview of the connection they share with their communities and the shared ancestry despite the distance that separates countries and nations states.

As Ashcroft has stated, "The place of a diasporic person's 'belonging' may have little to do with spatial locations but be situated in family, community, in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland. It is when place is least spatial, perhaps, that it becomes most identifying." (Ashcroft 2001, p.174) This aspect is exemplified in the text seen in the connection between the protagonist and her relatives in the homeland, a bond that is maintained through letters and mainly the collective memories shared by the communal members. The protagonist Dimple reminisces on how she had 'freeze-framed' the image of India,

I'd had a lot of trouble with everything, especially this last year, when my grandfather Dadaji died, before any of us could get to him, freeze-framing my image of India in a fast-escaping, ungrasped past. My mother had returned from Bombay with her accent newly thickened and her feeling that she should have never left as well. (Hidier 2002, p.6)

This passage is an insight into how the young diaspora does not have direct ties to India but is connected in some ways to remember the ancestral home. It is a mixture of nostalgia and longing because the place/location becomes sacred, as it inhabits the memory of a lost loved one. Unlike the older generation who maintain that connection by making trips and maintaining that connection they have with their homeland. For the younger members these concerns differ and as such they could probably relate to texts such as these better compared to the ones meant for adult readership where issues of nostalgia, longing and belonging are conveyed in dark serious tones.

For the young adult the homeland invokes a memory, a place locked away in the deep recesses of the mind and to revisit time to time, as exemplified by Dimple in the following passage,

India. I had few memories of the place, but the ones I held were dream clear: Bathing in a bucket as a little girl. The unnerving richness of buffalo milk drunk from a pewter cup. My Dadaji pouring tea into a saucer so it would cool faster, sipping from the edge of the thin dish, never spilling a drop. A whole host of kitchen gods (looking so at home in the undish washered unmicrowaved room). Meera Maasi crouching on the floor to sift the stones from rice. Cows huddled in the middle of the vegetable market, sparrows nesting on their backs. Hibiscus so brilliant they looked like they'd caught fire. (Hidier 2002, p. 15)

For the young protagonist the idea of the ancestral home is deeply tied with the members of the family who are left behind, 'Dadaji', (grandfather), and Maasi, (maternal aunt) along with the typical sights and scenes of lived situations which are deeply embedded in the mind. The images of India, which the protagonist remembers so vividly, are signifiers of the homeland, for instance the religious altar within the kitchen space is also seen in the metropolitan space of the protagonist's home. This is an example of how the homeland culture interpolates into the metropolitan space of America, which is through the replication of the original home. The grandfather (dadaji) and the aunt (maasi) are remembered through associations of memory related to India, "the drinking of tea from a saucer" is a typical Indian habit and the practice of sifting stones from rice signifies the preparation for the afternoon meal in an Indian household. The ancestral home is couched in the memories of the protagonist who keeps it alive through the act of reliving and reigniting these memories in

whichever space she is in. Thus the connection with the ancestral home is purely metaphoric and that which is related to the mind and the young adult's consciousness. In comparison to the protagonist's mother who still maintains a physical connection with the homeland. The mother expresses wistfulness and maybe even regret when she questions whether the move out of the homeland was a good decision in the first place. This mirrors the conflicting feelings diasporic people usually experience which is a common traditional diasporic concern in adult diasporic literature.

In this text we had looked at how most diasporic people especially the older generation prefer to lapse into their own cultural language in their own comfort zone. This has also been a cause for a new form of language, which is a merging of both the cultural language and the metropolitan language of English. The speakers alternate between both languages moving in and out fluidly or sometimes use words and meanings that can only be construed under specific situations as these are words that are known and comprehended by those who share the same ancestry and language.

The language spoken by the South Asian community is Hindi, a language that is widely spoken in the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Here we find that the elders in the community converse in their cultural language when there is a need for them to bond with each other or with members from their community. The young adults in the text have a good command of the language but their preference is towards speaking English even when replying to their parents, limiting their cultural language usage to greetings and in addressing the elders in respectful terms.

It is also interesting to note that culture ties in closely with the language of the homeland and in moments of extreme emotions such as joy or stress or sadness, the older generation tend to immediately revert to their cultural language almost instantaneously, an act that stems from the subconscious. For instance when the protagonist comes home after her outing with her American friends and her parents catch her in a slightly drunken state there is much agitation the next morning between the parents and her. The protagonist Dimple observes,

My father and mother formed a united front in showing me their backs. I wished they would at least look at me...Thank Ram Kavita is coming, the back of my mother's head commented-enough of these hanky-panky friendships of yours. (Hidier 2002,p.76)

The protagonists' mother calls upon her God 'Ram' and uses words like, "hanky-panky" a way of using rhyming words which is a common way of speaking the "Hindi" language.

Dimple's mother shows disbelief and shock when she finds out from her daughter Dimple, how the "funnel –method" of drinking at parties is quite common among the young party crowd.

Why would a person be doing this? Cried my mother...-So more alcohol goes in faster, I explained. As soon as I said it I realised my feet were both securely in my mouth, "Oh Bhagvan!.. My mother cried, pulling out a chair and collapsing into it-My daughter is an alcoholic! (Hidier 2002,p.77)

The mother's clear agitation can be seen in all the expressions calling out to God in the cultural language. This aspect of reverting back to one's own language resonates with the writer's responsibility in a cross-cultural text to employ techniques, which help 'situate' the word or phrase for the diasporic young reader. It also shows that to convey the reality of that particular culture no other word will best substitute the word other than the one used from their cultural language.



The writer thus has appropriated the Standard English language by interpolating and inserting words from his own cultural language and by doing that has nativised the English language to serve his own purpose. First, to convey the sentiment emotion felt by the character who being a hybridised individual has the need to use both the inherited languages to convey an expression. Secondly, to show authenticity as the phrase is taken from the cultural language and as such it will be more impactful to the reader. Finally, to highlight the syncretism and hybridity that exists in the many aspects of life in most diasporic people. The usage of phrases and words from the cultural language in a text that is written in the dominant metropolitan language is indication of the interpolation that takes place. It is not only the interpolation of languages but South Asian/Bengali cultural elements also gets interpolated into the reading space and becomes accessible to a global readership.

The young protagonist takes the effort to brush up on her knowledge on South Asian identity in preparation for a conference in NYU (New York University) jointly hosted by the South Asian Studies and Women's studies department, an event she was invited to by her cousin Kavita. The research unearths new aspects on the history and culture of her heritage. She finds herself fascinated with the historical aspects of India and immerses herself into the literature available on Indian History. As she delves deeper into her research she discovers,

Books on Indian mythology, Gandhi and Nehru biographies, a personal history of Partition, travel guides, books on elephants, on Indian classical dance, the British Raj, the overturn of the British Raj, the princely states, the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the stories of Satyajit Ray; the Mahabharata and Ramayana, guides to Indian architecture, alimentation and Ayurvedic treatments. How had I missed these? (Hidier 2002,p.286)

In Ashcroft's words, "[...] it is in literary texts that some of the most disruptive and evocative potentialities of historical interpolation may occur because it is in literature that the allegorical nature of historical discourse becomes revealed." (Ashcroft 2000,p.103)

The text is able to educate the young reader on various levels; one, how history is told in a different perspective through the lens of people who have the lived experience; second, how place and history connotes a larger meaning than what is visible on the outset, bringing the histories and culture of the ancestral land to the diasporic young person who is living in a far off metropolitan city. The engagement with the culture and historicity of the homeland would be able to create awareness and a sense of pride within the young diaspora which eventually can lead to the development and growth of the young person.

Through the rich descriptions of history and the historical heroes of the past, the history of the homeland interpolates into the consciousness and imaginary of the diasporic South Asian young adult who lives far away from her homeland. By engaging in narrative strategy the diasporic writer brings to the young adult a history of the world and culture from a time and space that otherwise could never be inhabited, situations and experiences that the young adult reader would never possibly encounter directly. Through stories that have the power and potential to touch the reader, the engagement between Indian and her young diaspora takes place.

The young protagonist in the novel is swept through an era of history that she never knew existed and this propels her interest in the ancestral history of the homeland her parents came from, the history of the old world becomes the history of her grandparents, parents and generations to come, a legacy and ancestry that is passed down. This is particularly important in the creation of one's sense of self and the building of self -identity.

The protagonist after reading about her ancestral history exclaims,

I had to admit it was fascinating, some of it. There were really sad stories about Partition when India was divided into India and Pakistan, and how the people you'd drunk tea with for years turned into your enemies overnight, sometimes betraying you in a heartbeat, sometimes risking everything they had to protect you. And Gandhi was a more

complicated man than I'd imagined-there were stories that didn't match up between the British and Indian books. History wasn't that easy a thing to learn [...] it wasn't a static story about dead people. It was a revolving door fraught with ghosts still straining to tell their version and turn your head, multifaceted and blinding as a cut diamond. (Hidier 2001, p.289)

This passage shows the depth in which the young protagonist is moved by the historical facts that she learns about the history of her homeland and ancestry. This is indication of the interpolation into her deep consciousness, a breakthrough into a western way of thinking, seeds being planted for the growth and development of a young person's mind.

Here not only the personal history of the family between the protagonist and her grandfather is brought to the fore but their communal history and the historicity of the nation itself. The text is able to educate the young reader on various levels, one, how history is told in a different perspective through the lens of people who have the lived experience, second, how place and history connotes a larger meaning than what is visible on the outset, bringing the histories and culture of the ancestral land to the diasporic young person who is living in a far off metropolitan city. The engagement with the culture and historicity of the homeland would be able to create awareness and a sense of pride within the young diaspora, which eventually can lead to the development, and growth of the young person.

In the text there are many references to Indian culture, mythology and folklore, which has the potential to give readers an insight into complex ancient texts such as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The stories however are told in a simple uncomplicated way that befits a young readers' imagination.

Ancient Indian folklore and myths are woven into the story line and you find the elder members of the family passing them down to the young protagonist. The protagonist's father relates the religious mythology in a simple way yet with an explanation as to why certain Indian practices are still practiced and cherished as custom.

Oh, bacchoodi, its' because you don't understand what this means in Indian culture, said my father gently.-The shoes and feet are...well, you know that in India children touch the feet of their elders to show respect.....And when you grow up reading the great Indian epics-the Ramayana, the Mahabharata-you cannot help but read a little of them into your life. In fact, they pervade your life, perhaps as the Bible does here. (Hidier 2002, p. 333)

The protagonist's father shares an aspect of the great Indian mythology *Ramayana* in a simple engaging way,

When Ram, heir to the kingdom of Dasaratha, was unjustly banished to the forest by his stepmother-in order to clear the title for her own son, Bharata-this son kept Ram's padukas, his wooden clogs, on the throne as a sign of his love and respect and devotion for his elder brother. Who himself felt was the rightful heir. Bharata sat beside the throne, beside these shoes, looking after the kingdom and guarding Ram's place until his return-fourteen years later. (Hidier 2002,p.334)

Through the sharing of the allegorical tale between father and daughter, Indian history and mythology is transmitted in a simple and engaging way making it more palatable to a young reader.

By including the great Indian epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the writer is bringing the ancient Indian history and mythology to the narrative space and a larger audience. These timeless stories have great benefits and reading and understanding them would definitely impact the diasporic young reader. Not only does he connect with the epics which recount the glorious past of India, but bridges are built between his western world and his South Asian heritage.

Through the use of cultural symbols and cultural texts (the great Indian Epics) the writers are able to bring the ancestral land to the fore and to the present signifying an interpolation of space and time. Readers from the same culture would be able to relate to these myths, legends, and allegory, probably heard through the oral tradition from their grandparents but reinforced through a modern young adult text available through a western publishing system. What is important to note here is these young adult texts are written for global readers, by including South Asian/Indian cultural elements, in the form of allegory or cultural symbols the narrative space gets transformed into a South Asian/Indian space. The diasporic young adult reader will have access to myths and folklore that does not revolve around the western archetypes but their own ancestral archetypes. If they have been reading about the elements of Celtic history, princes, fairy godmothers, witches and wizards, by engaging in these South Asian young adult texts they would get an insight into the world of mythical archetypal heroes of ancient Indian folklore and mythology. Cultural and historical engagement takes place between the diasporic young reader and the homeland when they read and connect with young adult texts of this nature.

#### INTERPOLATION OF PLACE, HISTORY AND ALLEGORY ON HABITATION AND HORIZON TO CREATE TRANSNATIONAL HABITATION

The ability to inhabit a transnational space is exhibited in this text through the protagonist's capacity to 'travel' in a metaphoric sense back to their homeland, which gives her the ability to foster a string ethnic identity and soothe the marginality that she faces in the western space. As such assimilation and transnationalism are interconnected for it gives a pluralist perspective to emerge.

In the beginning of the text the protagonist seemed to yearn after an identity that resembles that of her American friends. The conflicting views between the young protagonist and her mother is evident when the mother claims the following,

It isn't only food that goes through the umbilical cord, beta, said my mother from her podium, dramatically rolling her cotton top up a smidge to reveal her belly button. She promptly snapped it back down as if two seconds was all the human eye could take or deserved, of this mystical sight- Memory and dreams and history-all the things of the third eye-these pass through too, like spiritual food."[...]Mom but I was born in USA- But India is in your blood. It's not going anywhere without you. (Hidier 2002,p.284)

However the protagonist's view changes in the course of the story within the text where she adopts a whole new perspective.

The American identity that she craves for in the beginning of the text is symbolised by the 'fake identity' her best friend Gwyn gives her. After living the life of an American teen using her fake identity card, the protagonist comes to a realization that she could never fully assimilate with the western culture and slowly gravitates towards her own ethnic and cultural identity. She becomes aware that while she is technically an American she will always carry her Indian ancestry, a vital part of herself that makes her identity whole and complete. This self-realization is encapsulated in the following passage where she throws her fake 'id' into a mass of swirling water and gains a new perspective,

I reached into my wallet now and pulled it out, the perilous piece of plastic. The identity she gave me. I stared at the girl in the palm of my hand, this girl with the headlit eyes, surrounded by a web of lies as to who she was, and when and how. How could I have ever hoped to be her? I turned my hand over, knuckles rising. The plastic flipped over a few times before landing. Water caught, it hurdled through the middle hole of the bridge and was gone. (Hidier 2002, p. 398)

The casting away of her fake identification is symbolic of the letting go of a false identity, gains an understanding on how the merging of both her worlds, the American and the Indian, can help define a person and his/her place in the larger community.

The protagonist goes through a series of life challenges and finally comes into a realization of her own being, a new self-identity that has emerged out of all her crises and she gratefully acknowledges and accepts it. The history of the old world becomes the history of their grandparents, parents and generations to come, a legacy and ancestry that is passed down. This is particularly important in the creation of one's sense of self and in the building of self-identity. There is a feeling of belonging through the shared ancestry, positive attitude towards their ethnic group and an involvement in the culture and the cultural practices of their community.

Horizontality is also about the capacity to connect space and time and this process involves the mind and the consciousness as seen in this text through the protagonist's ability navigate spaces from the past and the present through the recollections of memory. The capacity to share history and past experiences is part of reliving the repertoire of cultural resources that people of shared ancestry have. The imagining and the re-imagining of these memories has the capacity to form places where meaningful connections can be made.

Dimple has been able to maintain her relationship with her grandfather even though they lived in different continents. The letters and photographs serve as a powerful medium of connection that strengthened their relationship. The grandfather becomes the link that connects both the cousins, a bond which had flourished across space, people and time. A relationship that is restored back after a long absence, this was possible because the seeds had already been planted for it to take full growth.

The different generations in the ancestral lineage get the opportunity to reconnect with each other across space and time through the memories that surface from a mere photo album. This goes to show that relationships that are based on familial ties sharing the same ancestry can be sustained and strengthened despite the limitations of boundaries, space and time. The protagonist in this text is able to inhabit a transnational space when she welcomes her Indian heritage into her metropolitan space and is able to merge both her inheritances together to create a unique identity which is reflective of both. This also shows that when a diasporic person is able to embrace both the opposing cultures only then will he/she be truly able to appreciate the third space that they find themselves in. Through interpolation, the ancestral home becomes a borderless horizon and is replicated into multiple sites scattered across the most advanced nation states in the world. Global access to cultures also mean more transnational communities and this eventually would also mean multiple choices of identities. In such a global environment, the young Diaspora becomes much closer to his/her homeland. Paranjape claims, 'unreal homelands need to be infused with flesh and blood to ensure the survival of the diasporic self.' (Paranjape 2001, p.13) but in the present global context real homelands can not only be imaginary but can be a well-imagined place because it has been made accessible through literature.

Habitation and its corollary Horizontality is thus more than the occupying of a physical location; it is itself a 'way of being' through which place comes to be. (Ashcroft 2001, p. 159) The young adults' concept of place and 'habitation' now changes, the habitat is not only a place that is situated in the western nation, they also habituate a world that co-relates and overlaps with their parents or grandparents. While habitation describes a way of engaging boundaries, horizon depicts the spatial possibilities, the ability to see beyond a limiting horizon. In this scenario the young adult who has the advantage of engaging in diasporic texts in reality expands such horizon through the spatial possibilities ahead of him/her, space becomes something limitless and spreads out endlessly. The understanding and awareness that comes from the transnational impact expands one's horizon and there is

no special limitation. By interpolating transnationally, their horizon shifts and they are able to inhabit both worlds and be comfortable in both.

## CONCLUSION

Diasporic writers who focus on narratives related to the ancestral home and its culture actually bring the ancestral land to the global context and make it viable for engagement between the ancestral land and its young diaspora. This transnational act will eventually have transforming effects in young individuals because it changes the way they perceive the homeland and the ancestral culture. The connection that is being made between the homeland, its cultural practices and values, the landscape, folklore, language to the young reader, provide dimensions of transformation, a result of the impact of transnationalism. These interconnections between the homeland and the diaspora facilitated by literature, in the form of cultural texts is a form of globalization, as it creates a network of relations and connections where the history and events of one region of the world can come to have significance for individuals and communities in distant regions of the globe. The interchanges of knowledge that takes place from the literature to its different readership who are scattered all over the world, who read about similar experiences they might have shared being diasporas and connected because of their same historical origin, enables a form of kinship that transcends borders. These affiliations they form with the ancestral culture and homeland, with other diaspora within the country or other parts of the world, provides a sense of belonging that would also help in the building of identities, an element that was missing in the literature for young adults written by the mainstream. Through engagement with diasporic texts, readers will come to understand that we live in a society where multiple worlds coexist, and they are not limited to fixed nations and geographies. It will help them make sense of the personal and communal interactions and the multiple social locations they navigate across time, places and people.

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