

## **Transnational Identity in Unaccustomed Earth: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Short Fictions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper intends to examine transnational identity of first- and second-generation Indian diasporic and/or transnational subjects through the portrayal of protagonists in Jhumpa Lahiri's and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's short fictions: "Unaccustomed Earth" and "Hell-heaven" (2008), "Clothes" and "Silver Pavements and Golden Roofs (1995)". Theories of transnationalism, identity and transnational identity were used to scrutinise the ways those fictional characters define themselves as well as the ways they negotiate homeland and the 'unaccustomed earth'. This paper also discovers opportunities, and difficulties faced by first- and second-generation Indian immigrants, and the differences between the impacts of crossing national boundaries towards both communities. This study used textual analysis of

selected narratives for an understanding of transnational identity in literature, and how Indian diasporic or transnational subjects made sense of their roots and routes when those fictional characters were trapped in between their Indian roots, and the need to make sense of unaccustomed earth.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received: 21 September 2020

Accepted: 18 December 2020

Published: 26 March 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.1.24>

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*Keywords:* Divakaruni, Indian immigrants, Lahiri, short fictions, transnational identity

## INTRODUCTION

Indian literature in English by diasporic writers or South Asian American writings or writings on diaspora and related issues have been significantly debated especially with regard to identity, the binary between 'self' and 'other', home and sense of belonging, nationalism and transnationalism, the third space, multiculturalism (see Ahamed, 2017; Arjopalo, 2015; Asl, 2018; Farshid & Taleie, 2013; Ibarrola-Armendáriz, 2011; Jahan, 2003; Kachhia, 2016; Kumari, 2014; Kuortti, 2007; Lau, 2004; Marwah, 2013; Mishra, 1996; Nair, 2015; Reshmi, 2019; Sen, 2009; Shameem, 2018; Vijayakumar & Rajasekaran, 2018; Watkins, 2016). Nevertheless, identity construction is not a thing of the past or an anachronism in social, cultural and literary studies but, it becomes the motivation for diasporic writers to narrativise their stories. Even though issues pertaining with the identity of diasporic and/or transnational subjects living in the U.S. are immensely deliberated, they are still noteworthy to be scrutinised especially for all the gaps regarding second- or third- or subsequent generation subjects.

"By contrast to the proliferation of first-generation diasporas in South Asian diaspora fiction, representations of second-generation diasporas are relatively few" (Watkins, 2016, p. 584). This paper tries to fulfil the lacuna as it examines second-generation diasporic and/or transnational subjects by juxtaposing first- and second-generation subjects since Jhumpa Lahiri emphasises second-generation while Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni narrates first-

generation Indian immigrants in the U.S. Apart from that, this study chooses to focus on transnational identity in relation to the ways diasporic and/or transnational subjects construct and re-construct their transnational identity, and how they make sense of both 'home' and 'host', to ascertain their roots, routes and to use Lahiri's metaphor, 'plant seeds in unaccustomed earth'. We believe that the discussions on roots, routes and unaccustomed earth are still relevant in the field, bearing in mind recent generation and contemporary cross-border mobilities.

Lahiri, a second-generation Indian-American author questions her own identity even though she represents Bengali's cultural values in her stories. Lahiri feels that she does not belong anywhere. Lahiri's (2008) confusion of her own identity and sense of belonging is portrayed in *Unaccustomed Earth* where most characters are still trying to discover their identity. Similarly, Divakaruni (1995) also justified the idea that diasporic writers themselves faced difficulties in constructing their own identity when they crossed borders. Divakaruni (1995) had to comprehend being a first-generation Indian diasporic subject who was displaced from time and space. She examined the sense of being disconnected in a world that could not be called 'home.' Most characters in *Arranged Marriage* (1995) are caught in between choosing to live by Indian traditions or assimilating the host country's cultures and traditions whether physically or psychologically.

According to Reshmi (2019), Indian women writers who constitute diaspora

and/or transnationalism often represent the idea of cross-cultural exchanges and the need to construct and re-construct one's identity in the state of dislocation, in order to adapt the host land. Lahiri is one of the writers who receives intense attention from literary critics or scholars, especially those who study migration and diaspora as well as the binary between East and West (see Asl, 2019). Karthikadevi (2015) discussed Lahiri's short stories as the portrayals of dilemmas in the lives of people who were in between homeland and an "alien" country. Lahiri highlighted several themes such as alienation, isolation, diaspora, belonging, assimilation, love, marital relationships, familial relationships, home and self-realisation (Karthikadevi, 2015; Yun, 2014). Most characters in her fictions struggle to define their identity and sense of belonging as they have left their homeland. Some of them construct another space as they feel isolated and do not belong in both homeland and host land. Vijayakumar and Rajasekaran (2018) demonstrated similar ideas when they examined Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, in terms of negotiating multiculturalism when one moved beyond border through illustrations of major protagonists and how they made sense of their life.

On the contrary, Ibarrola-Armendáriz (2011) claimed,

*Unaccustomed Earth* is populated by a highly diverse gallery of characters who, as a result of different circumstances – the job they do, the person they've married, the place they live in or the company they keep–, are seen to give

up many of the customs and values that have governed their parents' lives (p. 166).

In the article, he proposed the idea that Lahiri's works should be analysed in terms of its universality as assimilation and adaptation or any other issue which boxed Lahiri into the realms of immigrant experiences was no longer a concern for second-generation immigrants. Instead, Lahiri's focus appears to be on essential matters that are beyond the bounded categorisation of individuals based on the idea of origin. In short, Lahiri's fictions suggest universality and they are not constructed in relation to the idea of diaspora and/or transnationalism as well as the need to search for one's identity. They should be studied based on the portrayal of everyday life and its moral ground.

Additionally, Shameem (2018), using theories of postcolonial, postmodern and diasporic feminism, studied both Lahiri's and Divakaruni's works in her thesis, stating the idea that South Asian diasporic identity for female was different from her male counterpart and identity suggested constant creation instead of implanted in one's own. Lahiri's and Divakaruni's female characters face continuous conflicts in terms of assimilation into another culture as well as in their constant negotiation of the past and present. Shameem also highlighted several criticisms on Lahiri and Divakaruni, which questioned their representations of the third world (India) and the first world (U.S.). This suggests the act of writing as both 'insider and outsider' of both worlds. Meanwhile, Asl (2018), Asl and Abdullah

(2017), Asl et al. (2016), and Asl et al. (2018) studied 'literary gaze' and 'panoptic gaze' in Lahiri's fictions, emphasising 'gendered' and 'racialised' gaze as they deliberated how Lahiri represented Indian diasporic subjects.

Apart from that, Jahan (2003) denoted that Divakaruni explored the binary between the East and the West, through the eyes of Indian diasporic subjects who left their homelands for good. Throughout her narratives, Divakaruni juxtaposed India and the U.S within her first-generation Indian diasporic subject who transformed from being rooted in Indian traditions to a more modern and dynamic woman or man. Furthermore, Sahi (2009), asserted that Divakaruni was trying to explore mental horizons of the people from the East in the sense that, when fictional characters in *Arranged Marriage* crossed national boundaries, their thinking and perspectives of things would be broader compared to those who remained in India. Kumari (2014) reflected people who were caught in between two worlds and experience various conflicts in their lives because of the memory of the past and the need to face reality and future which awaits them. The discussions which involve Lahiri and Divakaruni, mostly emphasise migration issues and diaspora, particularly in terms of continuous creation of 'identity' when two cultures, the East and the West encounter.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper used textual analysis of short fictions by Lahiri and Divakaruni to discover

the transnational identity of first- and second-generation subjects. We read selected texts as well as other related materials which portray migration related discourses and issues which deliberated those migrants or immigrants who struggled to make sense of their ancestral and cultural roots while residing in host land. Apart from that, the concept of transnational identity was used as a paradigm to analyse how 'roots' and 'routes' influence the ways first- and second-generation diasporic and/or transnational subjects negotiated their space when they chose to cross borders.

First and foremost, in the past few decades, the terms 'transnationalism' and 'transnational' started to be acknowledged in the study of migration especially by anthropologists, sociologists, cultural analysts, and economists. Transnationalism started to be developed further after a conference in Mijas, Spain organised by Linda Basch, Christina Szanton Blanch and Nina Glick Schiller in 1994. Basch et al. (1994), delineated transnationalism as the processes through which immigrants constructed social fields that tied together their homeland and host land. According to Thapan (2005), transnationalism renders people to perceive those who cross their national boundaries as people who constitute and juggle different domains, the past (homeland) and the present (host land) via connection and obligation to both territories simultaneously. In short, those who are included in the transnational community are people who belong to more than one particular nationality or nation-state, and

they try to connect both worlds. It is supported by Basch et al. (1995); they called transnational migrants, 'transmigrants' who lived in a world where they still maintained multiple ties such as, social, familial, political and cultural, beyond the boundaries of nation-states.

Additionally, when transnationalism is acknowledged by the three anthropologists, they use the term for ethnographic studies and case studies pertinent to the conditions and identity of West Indian transmigrants from St. Vincent and Grenada as well as transmigrants from Haiti which have been straddling two different nation-states, their homeland and the U.S. They describe how those transmigrants involve in various activities which unite them with their homeland. For instance, in terms of politics, some transmigrants still cast votes during elections and they still assist their homeland in other aspects of life. When they reside in a new country, most of them will be attached to other diasporic and/or transnational subjects because usually, most of their experiences as immigrants are analogous to one another.

Furthermore, as transnationalism complicates the notion of identity for transnational and/or diasporic subjects living in a host country, scholars like Vertovec, Basch, Blanch, Schiller, Trucios-Haynes, Khan and Somerville outline issues of transnational identity. As identity is fluid and it requires constant negotiation and construction, it becomes multifaceted and complex for those who migrate as they search for identity, while trying to assimilate

with the host land. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. (2002) declared that place and displacement were two influential features of post-colonial studies in which, the question of identity emerged and it concerned with the identifying of self and location. Location becomes a motif that alters one's identity as when location changes, one will make sense of his or her identity for acculturation. Meanwhile, Vertovec (2001), accentuated that identity was a flexible concept that had been long discussed by scholars in the field of social science and it concerned with how an individual perceives his or herself and how he or she was defined by others. He also recommended the idea of comparing and contrasting transnationalism and identity hand in hand for a thorough understanding of both terms. He mentioned this was due to the reason that people perceived those who maintained homeland and host land as those who accumulated a 'common identity', an identity which was highly associated with their homeland. In contradiction, he believed in the logic that it was undeniable that those immigrants accumulated an identity which indicated not just one's homeland or just a space but, beyond.

Transnational identity insinuates the condition when an individual identifies with more than one nation-state or maintains social, cultural, economic and political ties within homeland and host land (Basch et al., 1995; Faist, 2010; Garrett, 2011; Ghorashi, 2004; Haller & Landolt, 2005; Khan, 2005; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Somerville, 2008; Thapan, 2005; Trucios-Haynes, 1997;

Vertovec, 2001). Transnational identity is highly associated with first-generation immigrants since they are ordinarily the ones who sustain multiple ties while their children struggle to identify with their ancestral and cultural roots as they were born and brought up in the U.S. (see Somerville, 2008). Both first- and second-generation experience certain disparities when it comes to making sense of their transnational identity which is different, not only from mainstream Americans but, those who do not constitute diaspora or transnationalism.

Ghorashi (2004) stated,

Within the social sciences, most studies of transnationalism take the approach that migrants experience a duality between the place of origin and place of residence. In that kind of approach, transnationalism refers to a sense of in-betweenness caused by this duality (p. 329).

In this sense, those who ascertain 'transnational identity' are those who still negotiate 'another space' or to use Bhabha's term, 'third space' as they are 'dual-citizens'. In addition, the usual argument concerning 'transnational identity' is its broad usage to cover all aspects of transnational mobilities when immigrants move beyond their national boundary, replacing the famous 'diaspora' or sometimes both terms are used hand in hand (see Faist, 2010). Similarly, Vertovec (2011) indicated,

Transnationalism is a notion that has become over-used to describe too wide

a range of phenomena (from specific migrant communities to all migrants, to every ethnic diaspora, to all travellers and tourists; cf. Vertovec 1999a). It is clear that transnational patterns among migrants take many forms in socio-cultural, economic and political arenas (p. 576).

He implied the idea that transnationalism was a term which was broadly used to describe similar experiences, in a way, it also complicated 'identity' for those who cross-borders whether first- or second- or subsequent generation. Hence, for this paper, the concept of transnational identity would be used to analyse the conditions of first- and second-generation Indian diasporic and/or transnational subjects through the portrayal of protagonists in Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth" and "Hell-Heaven" (2008) and Divakaruni's "Clothes" and "Silver Pavements and Golden Roofs" (1995).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

*Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is Lahiri's second collection of short stories after the success of her debut short stories collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). This study selects two short stories, "Unaccustomed Earth" and "Hell-Heaven." As some scholars agree that Lahiri's second short story collection is more universal (see Ibarrola-Armendáriz, 2011; Marwah, 2013), it can be argued that *Unaccustomed Earth* still presents migration issues through characters who are diasporic and/or transnational since the title itself implies an 'unfamiliar space'.

Diasporic and/or transnational subject's determinations to explore a space one's own in literary works are worth exploring as, in a way, they aid other subjects especially germane to current cross-border mobilities.

*Unaccustomed Earth* is probably relatable to Lahiri's condition as an American author of Indian descent. Usually, second-generation immigrants only remember the past through intergenerational memories, photographs and the ways their parents have embedded Indian values throughout their life as well as their temporary 'return' to the ancestral hometown. First-generation characters are usually interpreted as those who are in conflicts with the past and present while they are trying to permeate their past to their sons and daughters. In contrast, it is more intricate for second-generation Indian immigrants to comprehend their sense of belonging as they are neither living in the past nor a well-defined present. Thus, this study observes how Lahiri weaves her short stories within the interplay of migration issues and immigrants through her focus of second-generation Indian diasporic or transnational subjects for the sake of comprehending transnational identity and how those subjects make sense of their roots and routes to eventually plant their seeds in unaccustomed earth.

Ruma, a second-generation subject, in "Unaccustomed Earth" attempts to demarcate her transnational identity as Lahiri compares her with her mother who is deeply rooted in Indian traditions especially in terms of maintaining familial institution, food and clothing. While her mother used to

cook Bengali dishes, she is used to having Western food as it is simpler than having to cook Indian spices. Her mother is the one who has been continuously making sure that Ruma inculcates Indian values to her son and teaches him to eat Indian food and to speak Bengali. Instead, Ruma is used to her Western lifestyle, living in Seattle with her American husband, Adam and a son, Akash (a third-generation Indian-American subject) who cannot speak Bengali and who does not even understand their Indian roots.

However, her conflicts of identity ascend prominently after her mother's death as she feels the sense of loss for losing her mother who can be considered as the embodiment of Indian and India in her life. Her mother's absence disrupts Ruma's search for identity and sense of belonging. As much as she starts to disregard Indian cultural values, Ruma finds herself becoming like her mother as she stays at home, taking care of her son and family; "She didn't understand how her mother had done it... moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma's life now" (Lahiri, 2008, pp. 15-16). Instead of further detaching herself from her roots, she becomes closer to it perhaps because she always reminisces her mother especially when her father comes to visit her for the first time in Seattle. Fine (2011) insinuated the idea of attachment to 'familial identity' when she discussed Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth". She claimed that even when one tried to escape from one's roots or cultural

values embedded in one's life especially by parents or family members, he or she could not discard them. This is obvious through the portrayal of Ruma who 'creates' herself in a way she does not want to be like her archetypal Indian mother who is rooted with Indian cultural values even when living far away from her homeland and yet, she fails to do so.

Interestingly, instead of portraying first-generation as the one who straddles two different 'home' or who accumulates transnational identity while second-generation is the one who easily assimilates into another culture, Lahiri portrays the idea that perhaps, first-generation parents do not find it hard to accept a new culture. Lahiri further draws the idea by portraying Ruma's father as to more accustom to American's way of life instead of his roots. For instance, while other Indian parents usually do not criticise a daughter's decision to stay at home or become a housewife, Ruma's father questions her decision of staying at home and taking care of her son even when she is a law graduate. This proves that her father is not a typical Indian who abides by the patriarchal system where it is sensible for a wife to stay at home rather than working. Farshid and Taleie (2013) described Ruma's father as a subject who did not follow traditions and cultural values as he crossed national boundaries and became accustomed to the new way of life.

This situation is made obvious through Lahiri's emphasis on the metaphor of 'planting seeds in unaccustomed earth'. When Ruma's father visits her, he resuscitates

the dying plants in Ruma's garden aside from adding new ones. Towards the end of his visit, he reminds Ruma to look after her new garden. He plants the seeds for Ruma so that Ruma can have her renewed garden, suggesting a fresh start, especially after her mother's death. The imagery of 'planting seeds in unaccustomed earth' is fundamental for diasporic and/or transnational subjects whether first- or second- or subsequent generation as it entails a new beginning, different from the old one. "Gardening is a significant metaphor for the existential dynamics of diaspora. Ruma's father's inclination towards gardening may be accounted as the diasporic people's and specifically his proclivity to adaptation to new world, readiness to 're-root' in the alien land..." (Begum, n.d., p. 4). Wutz (2015) also proposed a similar idea as the symbolism of 'planting' or 'gardening' signify a continuous process, something that kept developing and growing. In other words, it can connote the idea of 'building' and 'sustaining', which are needed by diasporic and/transnational subjects who try to make sense of a new space. On the other hand, this act of 'planting' is also in a way, ironically indicates the act of 'burying' the past for her father since he is somehow starting to suppress the memory of living with his wife as he finally finds a new adventure with Mrs. Bagchi whom he meets during his travel.

Furthermore, Lahiri often juxtaposes two characters from different generations for readers to understand that perhaps, both generations designate a different set of



identity and sense of belonging. Just like Ruma, another second-generation Indian transnational subject, Usha struggles to determine her identity since her mother, Aparna controls most parts of her life. As Lahiri compares and contrasts Ruma and her parent, in “Hell-Heaven”, she compares and contrasts Usha and her first-generation Indian mother who is well-rooted in Indian cultures and who does not adapt well with American cultures. Her mother, Aparna always makes sure that Usha preserves her identity as a child of Indian descent even when she feels comfortable with American cultural values and lifestyles.

Just like most first-generation Indian women who migrate to other countries outside India for the sake of marriage, Lahiri portrays Aparna as an archetypal Indian mother who maintains the household and who succumbs to the needs of her husband and familial institution. The archetypal Indian mother who is still rooted in Indian cultures and who cooks Bengali food for meals and who spends most of the time feeling lost in unaccustomed earth. On the other hand, Alfonso-Forero (2007) designated the idea of ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ through Indian diasporic mother who struggled to maintain Indian cultural values in their private life while acknowledging the need to integrate host land’s cultural values. This is made obvious through motherhood as mothers realise the need to sustain their family in unaccustomed earth. She used Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2004) to signify that Lahiri introduced a different version of Indian women characters as she did not

represent them as victims but, she gave them the chance to explore their transnationality and made sense of both worlds.

Since Usha and Aparna become close to Pranab Kaku, a young Bengali-American character, Usha begins to understand her mother’s sense of loss as she has to leave her past behind for the sake of marriage. Connecting to a new culture is not easy when she is disconnected from her husband, causing her to search for attention and affection from Pranab Kaku. However, when Pranab Kaku found an American girlfriend, things start to change. Usha develops a close relationship with Deborah and Pranab Kaku while her mother begins to give excuses not to go out together. Usha’s relationship with Deborah indicates her fondness to American culture. With Deborah, she can express herself better, “Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home” (Lahiri, 2008, p. 82). In this sense, she feels confined by her mother who insists that she sustains her Indian roots, forgetting the need to assimilate and acknowledge the fact that they are now living in the U.S. It is later that Usha narrates her mother’s changes. In her old age, she begins to accept Usha’s connection to American culture, and in her old age, she starts to achieve her freedom to explore new horizon in her life in which she starts going to college. It is only in her old age that Aparna starts to ‘plant seeds in unaccustomed earth’.

The dichotomy between Usha and Aparna is obvious, for Usha, at first, she

seems to accept both cultures (Indian culture within her private space at home and American culture in public), in this sense, she tries her best at both while ‘planting seeds in unaccustomed earth’. Meanwhile, for Aparna, it is a little bit late when she finally finds comfort in both when she begins to accept the fact that she is living within host land’s cultural values. While discussing the juxtaposition of mother-daughter, first-versus second-generation, we observe differences between two second-generation characters, Ruma and Usha. While Usha strives to look forward and to build her own ‘home’ in the U.S., Ruma appears to return to the past and try to somehow ‘re-root’ to Indian traditions even though at first, she tries her best to deny them. This is probably due to age and maturity as Ruma is older compared to Usha and she has also experienced losses in the U.S., not only losing her mother but, sometimes losing herself while trying to make sense of the past and present. Therefore, there are still contradictions of individual experiences regardless of generation. Some second-generation subjects can easily ‘plant seeds in unaccustomed earth’ but, some of them need reminders from their parents that they need to begin anew.

Correspondingly, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) is narrated along the lines of transnationalism and identity as it depicts alienation, displacement, tradition, adjustment, exile, assimilation and struggles as well as success stories of those who live in a country that is at first, always alien and peculiar. It consists

of twelve individual short stories and for this particular study, two short stories are selected: “Clothes” and “Silver Pavements and Golden Roofs”. Divakaruni’s characters are those first-generation Indian diasporic and/or transnational subjects who need to leave India for a personal reason especially due to marriage and education. Researchers like Dubey (2016), Shameem (2018), Karthikeyan (2018) and Asl et al. (2018) explored Indian diasporic authors’ emphasis on women characters in their narratives. Most characters who struggle to define their identity in the context of diaspora and/or transnationalism are women. Women characters are trapped, not only in between their Indian roots and the need to adhere to a new culture but, they are also trapped in the familial institution as they have to submit to patriarchy which is accustomed within Indian society. However, Karthikeyan (2018) believed that Divakaruni empowered women in the sense that her characters were seen as agents of change when they crossed national boundaries. Divakaruni depicts the excitement and a mixture of diverse emotions felt by women characters when they board planes to leave India for the first time in their life.

At first, Indian diasporic subjects feel guilty of leaving the past behind but, for the sake of exploring various opportunities, they eventually strive for excellence and somehow, at a certain point in life, manage to accept their new home even when they still have another home to remember. This suggests their ‘planting seeds in unaccustomed earth’ even when they are not

sure of what to expect or the consequences behind their choices. For instance, in "Clothes," Sumita, a first-generation Indian diasporic subject migrates to California, following her husband after agreeing to her father's choice of spouse. She imagines how different her life would be when she migrates to the U.S. Shameem (2018) noted the female protagonist's changed when she left her homeland for the U.S. through her preference of Western clothing but, at the same time, Sumita believed her assimilation into another culture as something disgraceful as she pondered that, if she were still in India, she would not have the idea of changing herself or becoming 'westernised'.

Divakaruni reveals the transformation from India to the U.S. and the conflicts of transnational identity through the play of clothing, colour and familial relationship. Her changes become more obvious after her husband's death. Divakaruni mentions the custom for Indian widows in India as she states, "...all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings" (1995, p. 37). When most widows will return to India and still serve the in-laws the way they used to, Sumita sees a different future in the U.S. Divakaruni illustrates Indian diasporic women characters who escape from bounded cultural values especially when they are living in between homeland (which is embedded with the patriarchal system) and host land (which is a promising space) (Asl et al., 2018). Sumita is one of the

characters who embody the essence as, for her, living in the U.S is an escapism from any familial or cultural expectation.

"In the mirror a woman holds my gaze, her eyes apprehensive yet steady. She wears a blouse and skirt the color of almonds" (Divakaruni, 1995, p. 37). Like Lahiri who uses the metaphor of planting seeds in a land which is at first, unfamiliar, Divakaruni subtly uses 'colour' to suggest the act of 'planting' or creating a new life in the U.S. as she uses the colour of almonds which is similar to the colour of the soil. For Sumita, in particular, while other subjects, perhaps find a way back to their roots especially considering 'loss' (for instance, Ruma in Lahiri's fiction, depicts the idea of finding and acknowledging Indian roots once she loses her mother), Sumita does not 're-root' or 're-route' even when she loses her husband. Instead, she embarrasses her new profound destiny, planting a fresh start in the host land. Here, Divakaruni advocates a different version of a first-generation Indian immigrant who embodies women's empowerment, neglecting cultural values embedded in the past.

Furthermore, as transnational identity also affects the opportunities as well as struggles that Indian immigrants have to face especially in establishing and sustaining their life in the U.S, pertaining to their economy and stability, Divakaruni elucidates characters who suffer from financial difficulties in the promising land. In "Clothes", she imperceptibly highlights the struggle for Indian immigrants, particularly Somesh's struggle, working at 7-eleven for

them to finally move out from his parent's house. Likewise, in "Silver Pavement, Golden Roofs," before Jayanti moves to America and lives with her uncle, Bikram and aunt, Pratima, she thinks that the U.S. is a place of opportunities which can enhance people's life. However, seeing her uncle's struggles in sustaining his life in America, she starts to recognise the harsh realities of being an immigrant.

Apart from that, the title of the story itself is significant to the story as Jayanti pictures the U.S. as a luxurious space full of miracles and endless possibilities. Divakaruni explains a song Jayanti like to sing in India when she was a child, for several times in this particular short story; "Will I marry a prince from a far-off magic land, where the pavements are silver and the roofs all gold?" (Divakaruni, 1995, p. 46). Jayanti feels that the song is relatable to her life especially when she has experienced the reality of living as an immigrant. Later, when Jayanti and her aunt stroll along the neighbourhood, they are bullied by white teenagers who feel disgusted by their dark skin colour.

While people think of only opportunities of living in a developed country, they tend to forget the probabilities of having to experience difficulties especially when they are still considered as 'outsiders.' The country of opportunities in Jayanti's mind changes to the country which makes her feel timid and lost. Nevertheless, towards the end of the story, it seems that Jayanti implies her readiness to endeavour in America when Divakaruni states,

When I finally look down, I notice that the snow has covered my own hands so they are no longer brown but white, white, white. And now it makes sense that the beauty and the pain should be part of each other. I continue holding them out in front of me, gazing at them, until they're completely covered. Until they do not hurt at all (1995, p. 60).

Even when she has to fight through all demands, she believes that one fine day when she prospers in planting seeds in the unaccustomed earth, she would no longer have to bear the pain. This means she wants to embrace the host land because it is hard to retain her Indian identity without being discriminated or physically assaulted due to racism. Here, like in "Clothes", Divakaruni uses the 'colour' of snow to symbolise whiteness or superiority of the West and how 'coloured' try to mimic so that he or she will not be so distinct. Thus, due to having a transnational identity, both first- and second-generation Indian immigrants in the U.S. have to face, not only opportunities but, struggles as well when they cross-borders whether in terms of individual, social, cultural or economic.

Major characters in the short stories portray the construction of transnational identity and the conflicts of living outside India while preserving social and cultural ties with the homeland and the need to acknowledge the host land. Divakaruni's first-generation Indian diasporic and/or transnational subjects never forget India even when they have left India for a long time. As an example, Jayanti's aunt still

connects with her family in India through letters sent especially during important occasion or celebration. When Jayanti arrives, her aunt is excited to hear stories of home since she rarely returns home after she migrates to the U.S. besides, she still cooks Indian food and she still serves her husband during the meal. Seeing her aunt serves her husband the way most traditional Indian do, Jayanti feels as if she is still in India and not in the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

The act of making sense of unaccustomed earth to eventually plant seeds often causes disparities as it is always ambivalence for both generations since it is more of individual experiences even though a part of it is influenced by social and cultural values embedded throughout generations. Lahiri's and Divakaruni's short stories convey the act of planting seeds in unaccustomed earth through their descriptions of characters who are still adjusting in the U.S. while making sense of their roots and the path that they or their parents have chosen. Lahiri's second-generation subject, particularly, Ruma, exposes the idea of difficulty for a second-generation subject to fulfil her duty of planting seeds in unaccustomed earth since her father is the one who wants her to start a new life, forgetting the old one. While a first-generation subject like Ruma's father makes sense of his transnational identity and manages to cope well, Ruma is still thorn in-between, not knowing which way to follow.

Indian-American or Indian-British subjects or any other diasporic and/or

transnational subjects indicate their search for a space even though their individual experiences are different from one another. In the context of South Asian British subject, Hanif Kureishi's literary works interpret similar issues pertaining to diaspora and transnationalism. For instance, Kureishi's "My son the fanatic" describes the act of making sense of one's roots when Ali chooses to go back to his root, specifically in terms of religious identity. His father who does not force or even teach him to submit to any religious belief feels estrange of his son's sudden vicissitudes. This necessitates the idea of finding a space, when Ali cannot find his space in the host land, he retains his father's cultural and religious roots and creates his own. Ali even questions his father who, in a way, is justifying the idea of planting seeds in unaccustomed earth as he just wants to fit in. Just like most diasporic parents, Parvez imagines a better life in England especially for his son, yet, when Ali begins to change, his dreams of acquiring a better life is shattered.

Another discrepancy in the study of transnationalism and identity in literary works by diasporic authors is 'transnational identity' itself as it is frequently associated with the act of straddling two worlds, both homeland and host land through familial, social, cultural, political and economic ties. Tsuda (2012) called out attention to look at 'transnational identity' and 'simultaneity'. Tsuda believed that there was a need to vindicate the idea of straddling both homeland and host land since scholars often used it in a broad sense, suggesting both

physical and ‘mindscape’. Even though Tsuda does not relate it to literary works, we think that it is interesting to examine it in literary works in the sense that we should observe ‘simultaneity between receiving and sending country’ thoroughly rather than just focusing on how characters lead their life in the receiving country.

It is also an ambiguity to derive that only those who are first-generation immigrants constitute ‘transnational identity’ as they acknowledge both homes because sometimes, second-generation subjects also have to face challenges since they are Indian descents. It is not clear as to whether these characters ‘simultaneously straddle two worlds’, especially in the physical sense, meaning, the relationship between the sending and receiving country (for instance, the degree to which they support their family in India in terms of financial or would they go back to India to vote or other related activities, and not just their act of returning to India to visit their relatives). Therefore, Indian diasporic and/or transnational subjects or any other subjects who constitute ‘the hyphen’, straddling ‘home’ and ‘host’ or two worlds simultaneously whether physically or psychologically, continuously try to make sense of their roots and routes, to eventually succeed in planting seeds in unaccustomed earth or forever struggling to find a space of one’s own.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our gratitude to members of English Language Studies Section, School of Humanities, Universiti

Sains Malaysia (USM) for giving us words of encouragement and supports throughout the process of writing this paper.

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