

## Re-assessing “Home” in Literature and Culture

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**Sridhar Rajeswaran and Klaus Stierstorfer, eds. *Constructions of Home in Philosophy, Theory, Literature and Cinema: Essays in Honour of Nilufer E. Bharucha*. Gujrat: Centre for Advanced Studies in India, 2014. 320 pp. ISBN 978-93-82847-07-6.**

This book is a scholarly collection of twenty essays in honour of Professor Nilufer Bharucha, of the English department, at the University of Mumbai. Going through the book is like undertaking an adventure into the history of the constructions of home that give the readers a triple edged perspective on the issue from the view point of theory, literature and cinema. Conceptions of home have changed with modern globalisation and migration patterns, because geographic positioning has now become highly unstable. In the context of India, the concept of home, which is traditionally idealised as an extension of the homeland and its culture, has changed in the postcolonial period where cultural exchanges are no longer considered as a taboo but a necessary condition for transnational relationships. The articles in this collection engage with the theoretical concepts of home and belonging and move on to explore and examine how they are represented in the form of literature and cinematic language, and the contributors to the volume comprise both established and young scholars from India and the West.

A profile of Professor Bharucha reads like an introductory note that gives a brief overview of her illustrious career as a teacher, writer, editor, scholar, translator and jury member for the Commonwealth Literature Prize and Chief Investigator, Group for Research on the Indian Diaspora. The articles that follow are compiled in three parts; the first part engages in looking at the constructions of home from a theoretical point of view and the philosophical discussions that have developed over time. The second part is the longest with eleven essays on the literary representation of the issues of home and belonging. The third part gives an interesting account of how home is represented in cinema.

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The first chapter of the first part of the volume is an article by Jason A. Scorza: "At Home in the World." It raises two questions related to the issue of cosmopolitanism: i) is it possible to imagine a credible conception of world citizenship in view of an utopian conception of the world, and ii) if we take the non-utopian conception, what is the proper role of educators in developing the skills and competencies required for world citizenship. The author raises the issue that if global movement has erased meaningful national borders, it has also bred global conflict zones; against this backdrop, what is the role of educators in bringing home the idea of being "at home in the world." The author approaches the issue from different viewpoints such as the Stoic Conception (5), Cultural Conception (8), Humanitarian Conception (9), Political Conception (12) and Community Conception (15). These are different approaches towards "good citizenship" (20) which require individuals to understand their rights and accept their responsibilities as global citizens.

The second article, "Do We Have a Home," by Dalpat Chauhan, is translated into English by Professor Nilufer Bharucha from the original *Kyan Chhe Suraj?* (Where is the Sun?) (2000). It looks at the concept of home from the point of view of the marginalised in society, the Dalits in India. Home remains a unique and impossible dream for the Dalits as the writer points out that they are never allowed to build houses in the same row as the higher castes and are generally looked upon as outcasts. The upper castes relegate the identity of Dalits to the margin; their homes are burnt and they are driven out, so the longing for a home and identity remain a distant dream for them.

The third chapter is an article by Jacqueline D. Beebe which looks at the concept of finding a home from a spiritual angle: "Finding a Spiritual Home." The article gives a personal account of the narrator's ongoing search for the feeling of being "at home" with particular reference to three films related to the topic. The urge to go off the familiar realm of home for discovering a new and different experience characterises the initial years of the writer at Detroit and the film that correlates to this state of the mind is *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). The narrator's next image of home took shape in Japan; she had identified her sexual inclinations earlier and here she could enjoy being different, a lesbian. The feeling of home that one achieves by way of sharing and contributing is essential to belonging, and the film that she could relate to is *The Shawshank Redemption* (1984). The last phase of building a home inside, initiated the spiritual journey inwards in India. The journey from "being seen" to becoming the "seer" (36), the engendering of an "elemental sympathy" (36) with the universe, is parallel to the journey of the German tourist Jasmin in Percy Alon's 1987 film *Baghdad Café*. The writer concludes that to attain the state of spiritual oneness with creation, one must be able to make any place home because wherever one goes one carries the spiritual home inside.

The fourth article, “Self in a Home in a World,” is by Sanjay Mukherjee. It looks at the constructs of self in a home through literary and philosophical approaches. The philosophical approach to questions about our existence and purpose of existence is conceived by different cultures in the form of myth making. The home of the self is the world; and by the end of the twentieth century, after the First World War, the unreality of a stable home/world was represented in literature and cinema. Fantasy literature and science fiction began constructing a parallel world, which is a new home for humans. Anthropologists say that human beings have always seen themselves in relation to their society as “a function of a greater whole” that establishes the function of home in breeding a culture. Literature which has been considered an index of culture took within its purview political, social, economical and moral forces that dominated a civilisation. The writer observes that the concrete concept of home is more an imaginary thing than a reality and the role of literature is to liberate the self from the exigencies of passion and feelings so that it is at home with itself.

The fifth article, “Diaspora and Nation: An Exegesis on Placing Home” by Melanie R. Wattenbarger, raises the question whether “home” and “nation” are synonymous. Looking at it from Benedict Anderson’s concept of “communal imagining” to Bhaba’s idea of hybridisation, the writer shows how the concept of national imagining is challenged by postcolonial critics like Partha Chatterjee whose observations reflect the ways in which historically, home was not always synonymous with the state. Trends in theorising nation and nationalism vary with political changes in the world like the fall of Soviet Union and terrorist violence and genocide in Africa. Franz Fanon’s theory of educating the youth about the ideals of nation to “detrribalize and unify” (Fanon 141) the nation rather than divide into dissenting groups is relevant to the states struggling under the neocolonial pressures of economic globalisation. The writer warns readers that such theorising of the nation should not interrupt the study of nation in diaspora; what should be condemned are the ways nationalism is used to serve narrow interest of terrorist groups, religious fanatics and extremists. Khachig Tololyan describes nationalism “as a process, culminating in a felt entitlement of a community to land and the creation of a sovereign nation-state” (56). He uses two models in understanding diaspora, the arbor metaphor and the nodal web model (57). It helps to explain the nature of the diaspora, whether it is bi-local or has a transnational network across the world. The writer discusses the approaches of William Safran and Robin Cohen arguing that once the nation of settlement is felt to be home, the state of diaspora ends or with people like Jasmine D’ Costa conceptualising home as where the heart is, home and nation in diaspora studies acquires a multilocational character. Rushdie’s concept of home as spatially and temporally bound in imagination actually tends itself to the idea of belonging to multiple

nations in various ways across space and time. The writer concludes that though theories vary and complicate the concept of nation and home, as long as diasporic individuals conceptualise home in terms of nation and countries, academics should resist the urge to dispense with the nation.

The second part of the collection begins with Chandani Lokuge's article "The Aesthetic of Music in Amit Chaudhuri's Fiction," which looks at Chaudhuri's fiction that is bound by his love for the timeless tradition of Indian classical music. In his fiction, Chaudhuri explores the hallowed past of classical music and attempts to reconnect with "that elusive and romantic past" (69) of India through music. Sometimes his fiction takes on the texture of the documentary as he offers information on the various technical features of classical music. Chaudhuri's attempt is to promote classical music as a pathway to re-root and re-route India back into its national culture.

The seventh chapter is an article by Somdatta Mandal: "Whither Homeland?: Representations of Calcutta/Kolkata in the Fiction of Diasporic Bengali Women Writers." As the title suggests, the imprint of Bengaliness with its obsessions and passions is clearly visible in a body of writing in English by women writers of Bengali descent. Four writers under discussion use Calcutta as home/homeland in their works; representation of Calcutta acts as a kind of reference – a likelihood, a memory or a nostalgia. Apart from that the detailed descriptions of Calcutta houses in their writings "give them a cultural identity apart from their material reality" (82). The first writer under discussion is Bharati Mukherjee, who maintains that she is an American writer of Indian origin. She gave up the nostalgic outlook of her first novel, accepting her altered condition and America as her new home, but she could still feel related to the city of her birth in a strange way and in her later novels, she uses Calcutta as a cultural reference. Her efforts often end up in romanticising the city as an exotic locale. Prof. Mandal rightly observes, "Calcutta, the city where she grew up, and Bengal, the land of her forefathers, thus go on presenting themselves in various manifestations" (88) in her fiction.

The second writer discussed in the article is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who, like Mukherjee, moved to America for higher studies and settled there. Her fiction deals with the lives of immigrants in the United States, yet it is her Bengali identity that remains in the background. In her first volume of stories, she minutely details a glossary of Bengali words she uses within the text to explain the Bengali culture. In the subsequent novels she does away with the italics and glossaries, and deliberately uses Bengali words within the text. Prof. Mandal observes that *The Oleander Girl* (2013) is the first novel perhaps where Kolkata becomes the topos, the primary locus of the story and it "reeks in a typical Kolkata flavor what would make all diasporic readers feel nostalgic about 'home' they have left behind in Kolkata" (97).

The next writer is Sunetra Gupta, “a true diasporic Bengali” (97) whose writing reflects her love for the places she belongs to – Calcutta and London. As she mentioned in an interview to Mithu C. Banerjee: “What I think is one has to be comfortable with the notion that one has one’s cultural identity, and that one doesn’t necessarily have to be at ‘home’, so to speak.... I think we have to accept that we are going to be perpetually wandering” (101).

The last writer under discussion in Prof. Mandal’s article is Jhumpa Lahiri, a second generation diasporic writer who is not connected to Calcutta by birth, but her repeated and frequent visits to the city frame the perspective of the writer in her, as she learned to observe things as an outsider and achieved the “necessary combination of distance and intimacy” (103) with a place. Prof. Mandal concludes her article by observing that “there are many other writers who suffer from this ‘Calcutta syndrome’” (114) because the pull of the homeland remains very strong in these diaspora writers.

The eighth chapter is an article on travel discourse and trajectories by Avadhesh Kumar Singh, “Home and Beyond.” In this article, the writer makes the necessary distinction that home is an emotional construct while house is a spatial and material construct, and observes that the opposite of home is not homelessness but journey away from home. It is a necessary feature for the development of the human race because the “travails of travel teach more than all institutions put together” (122). The article focuses on how Travel discourse developed as a new genre during the Sung dynasty (960-1279) of medieval China and was known as “travel record literature” (126). The writer recounts briefly how the genre developed referring to Ibn Battuta’s journey, Paul Theroux’s travel account, the account of Bholanath Chunder serially published in a Calcutta periodical, Gujarati travelogue by Mahipatram Neelkantha, and points out how travel becomes a means of re-assessing one’s home (society) and refashioning it. But he also regrets the fact that with the advent of internet and digital modes of communication the pleasures of travelling and the pleasure of temporary homelessness is lost and travel writing has become outmoded and old fashioned.

In the next chapter, “History in Miniature,” Ameena Kazi Ansari investigates the construct of Home in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*. The article examines “home” as a major spatial construct in the novel against the backdrop of the historical reality of the 1947 partition and its violence. Home becomes the space where the carnage of partition is reconstructed, with women as its primary victims. The writer observes that there are three specific homes which symbolise the gradations of violence against women. The first is the secure refuge of Lenny’s home from where Shanta, the Ayah is abducted and dishonoured. The second is the camp for fallen women, a metaphorical “home” that victimises women further by subjecting the woman as one who “falls” denying the role of man in the fall. The third is a woman’s dehumanisation and

defeat through marriage as recognised by Lenny's godmother in the marriage of Ayah and the Ice-candy man. Homes in the novel become locational or ideological constructs that enact contemporary realities resulting from the politics of power.

The next article is a study of the concept of home in Yeats's poems by R. Ananthan, "My Home is far from the Tide." Though Yeats called himself one of the "Last Romantics," the writer prefers to call him a neo-Romantic. He observes how Yeats adopted from Wordsworth two defining points, the immortality of the soul and the authenticity of mystical perceptions. Yeats's soul is a pilgrim soul, the soul's home is what the neo-romantics seek and for Yeats it is Byzantium. Yeats wants to reach home, which is an aesthetic heaven where all the antinomies are resolved.

The eleventh chapter is an article by Mangala Sirdeshpande titled, "The Construct of Home in Indo-Mauritian Francophone Literature with Special Reference to the Novels of Ananda Devi." Ananda Devi is a leading Indo-French Mauritian writer and belongs to the group of those Mauritian writers of Indian origin who engage in a literary quest for their identity in a multicultural and pluralistic society and often recreate the homeland through memory. Images and constructs of home vary in her novels. The author observes that all the constructs of home in her novels breathe and live like human beings and they symbolically represent the people who live in them. In some novels, images of home represent a refuge like a womb for the unborn child; in some other novels, the house depicts the solitude and loneliness of the protagonist; and in others the house become a poignant image of negative energy. The idea of home is also constructed through language; use of familiar words and expressions is like a homecoming for the writer. The author points out how by mingling Creole or Hindi, Ananda Devi gives a new cultural and linguistic dimension to French.

The next article is by Karin Ebeling, "Fictional Constructions of Home." The author engages in exploring how writers construct "home" in their fiction. She relates the concept of home to language – the use of indigenised forms of English express familiarity to home and homeland. She examines how writers of postcolonial and transcultural literature use English as the language to construct different meanings of home that represent different attitudes and identities towards the concept of home as place, space and a state of being. She studies five fictional representations of home in literature starting from Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1944) to Amit Chaudhuri's *A New World* (2002), to demonstrate how the meaning of home has changed over time and how these changes have been represented by creative writers.

Chapter 13, "The Insider/Outsider View: Jhumpa Lahiri's Fictional Perception of India," is by Purabi Panwar. The article examines the fictional representations of India in Lahiri's works and seeks to analyse the

insider/outsider dichotomy in her fiction. Kolkata features in her earlier works most prominently but there is a gradual moving away, a yearning to belong to the country of adoption in her later works, because America is a country she grew up in and can relate to better than the land of her parent's origin. Lahiri seems to have achieved the perception that borders do not matter, nor countries; relationships transcend all these and can thrive only when it is sincere "on both sides" (199).

Chapter 14 is an article by Preeti Shirodkar, "[Be]Longing: Essaying the Story of the *Be Ghar* Diasporic." The article explores the concept of (be)longing, sense of ownership, and security and rootedness associated with home. Home serves as a subtext of diaspora, and memory or nostalgia plays a significant role in the construction of diaspora identity. The author opines that intermittent visits to the homeland in an attempt to refresh memory may create a biased perspective if one is incapable of noticing a change. On the other hand, homecoming is also a way of connecting with the home, as in the case of second and third generation diasporics. These two different approaches to diaspora give the diasporic visitor interesting perspectives; for the willing diasporic visitor it is a privileged position of being the insider-outsider; it gives a stereoscopic vision that incorporates both proximity and distance. The author acknowledges that the concept of home as it exists today is multi-locational, with its roots spread in many places; what matters is the sense of feeling at home than remaining at home.

Chapter 15 is an article by Iulia Rascanu titled, "Translated Rudeboys of Twenty-First Century London." It examines Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani* (2007), which is based on the issue of authenticity related to hybrid identities. The article explores the location of home in this paradigm of ethnicity and authenticity. In an interview, Malkani maintains about his characters that they are "inauthentic identities" (212). His characters are British Asian kids who are called "rudeboys" (212). They represent the "Facebook generation" (213); their identities are chosen. The focus shifts from roots to accommodating in an alien soil. They have their own rules by which they play chosen identities; they assert by being sometimes poignantly aggressive. Their development shows how they move from "rejection" to "cultural translation" (215), a desire integrate in the dominant group. The chapter adds a new dimension because the author focuses on how Malkani portrays a new type of identity that is continuously performed, changing and adopting forms.

The next chapter is an article by Bhaveen Savlani, "Constructing 'Home' in Motion: The Past, the Present and the Future in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*." The article is focused on the experiences of an exile as captured by the Chilean writer Isabel Allende in her first novel, *The House of the Spirits* (1985). Allende's novel is set in the twentieth century, but she positions her country and characters at a point in the past that is feudal and colonial. It is a mythic modern

nation that becomes a metaphor for a woman's body as cultural spaces, and Allende's novel classifies the women of her story as "sacred" and "profane" (231).

The third part of the volume is called "Home in Cinema" and deals with articles related to the representation of home in cinema. The first chapter of this section, and the seventeenth chapter of the book, is authored by noted Indian film director Bimal Roy's daughter Rinki Roy, and is related to Roy's films. The title of this article is, "The Journey Homeward in Bimal Roy's Films." It explores the theme of homelessness and displacement owing to migration in the films of Bimal Roy. Roy identifies home as a sanctuary, a place of ultimate rest while his sympathy lies with the displaced and the homeless. The use of the word "home" in a literal sense was first observed in his film *Naukari* (The Job; 1954). The yearning for "home" or "homeland" is noted in many of his films and figured in songs of *Sujata* (1959), *Bandini* (1963) and *Kabulimala* (1961). Roy adapted three of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novels in his films – *Parineeta* (1953), *Biraj Babu* (1954) and *Devdas* (1955). A common thread runs through all the three films – homes torn by conflicts and yet one's enduring love for home or hearth. One of Roy's celebrated films is *Do Beega Zameen* (1953), inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Dui Bigha Zamin." The film portrays how the peasant Sambhu looks upon the land as his mother and refuses to sell it to the landlord.

The next chapter is by Anna Maria Everding, titled "British South Asian Film and the Construction of Home and Belonging." The article charts how during the 1960s and 1970s few films in the United Kingdom dealt with the minority communities, and eventually with time the British cinema has become more diverse and the South Asian migrant communities came together to fight for their rights under the umbrella term "Black British" (251). As the second generation immigrants come of age, the dilemma of having hybrid identities is taken up by a great number of film makers from diverse communities – British, Indian, Pakistani, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, gay, straight and so on. Literary works by diaspora writers like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi also helped in building a foundation for the broader acceptance of British South Asian films. These films often depict xenophobia, the anxiety of the diasporic community to keep to themselves as a strategy against racial discrimination. The article discusses briefly Gurinder Chadha's film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) that presents the second generation immigrants as more liberated than their parents, yet still perceived as the "other" by the mainstream society. In contrast, the author observes that Damien O' Donnell's film *East is East* (1999) portrays how the Pakistani born father wants to cling to his roots and suppresses his children and their desire to find their own place in society. The influence of the home country steadily declines for the second generation which has moved away from the nostalgia of the "imaginary homeland."



The next article, “Yeh Jo Des Hain Tera, Swadesh Hain Tera,” is by Niharika Sinha. Interestingly, the article explores how Bollywood film music treats home as an emotional construct. The writer refers to the kind of contemporary Hindi films that draw on not just the Indian audiences of other nationalities, termed as “cross-over” (266) films. While in the past, Hindi films and their songs carried a moralistic and disapproving note about decadent diasporics as observed in the 1970 film *Purab aur Paschim*; in more recent films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), the song “Ghar aaja pardesi tera desh bulaye re” has the effect of a nostalgic looking back at the homeland. Another popular song that depicts the agony of the diasporic Indian worrying about his home and family is the song “chithi aayi hain, watan se chithi aaye hain” by Pankaj Udhas, in the film *Naam* (1986). Films like *Pardes* (1997), that show Indian families abroad taking the route to the old homeland in search of brides for their son, depict the homeland itself as a bride in the song “ye duniya, ek dulhan ke maathe ke bindiya.” Bollywood songs like these become the vehicles for conveying the pain, nostalgia and longing for home.

The last chapter of this volume is an article by Sridhar Rajeswaran titled “Home in Deepa Mehta’s Cinema: Insights and Implications.” Deepa Mehta is a filmmaker who was born in India but later migrated to Canada. The article points out that her interest in making films that would address three of the elements – earth, water and fire resulted in the trilogy, *Fire* (1996), followed by *Earth 1947* (1998) and *Water* (2005). The article explores Mehta’s insights related to specific locations and her perspective as different from male filmmakers. She is not just a diasporic filmmaker but one who gradually progresses towards a transnational perspective in her films. As a diasporic filmmaker, she has an insider-outsider perspective. The voice from the margins either integrates itself into new spaces or withdraws within the safe boundaries of home. When she addresses the nation-state, she is postcolonial and her postcolonial home has a connect with the great colonial houses that stood for suppression and exaction. She also addresses the issue of gender in her films, as the nation is cartographed on the body of a woman who suffers the trauma of partition, because she does not have the right to long for, or belong to a home.

On the whole, the volume is a collector’s choice, a treasure house for scholars and an enjoyable read for anyone interested in diaspora. The articles provide an insight into how “home” is constructed in theory, literature and cinema and investigate at large the prevailing theories of diaspora, from Socrates and Diogenes to Safran, Cohen, Rushdie and Partha Chatterjee. The second part of the collection provides an interesting study of diaspora literature ranging from South Asian American writers to British Asian writers, and even selected works of Chilean and Indo-French Mauritian writers. The third part deals with the depiction of home in cinema and how the new diasporic filmmakers use the constructs of home and belonging in their films to represent

the anguish of the exile or the effort of the new generation diasporics to identify with the main stream. The cinema is a powerful medium to reach the masses and lyrics of the songs act as vehicles for expressing the sense of loss of home or the longing for a lost home. There are very few typos in the book. The editors should be congratulated for bringing together so many distinguished scholars and researchers, many of whom are pioneers in the field, to participate in the volume, and equally for including several young researchers who have brought new dimensions to the study of home in diaspora in their articles.

### **Works Cited**

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