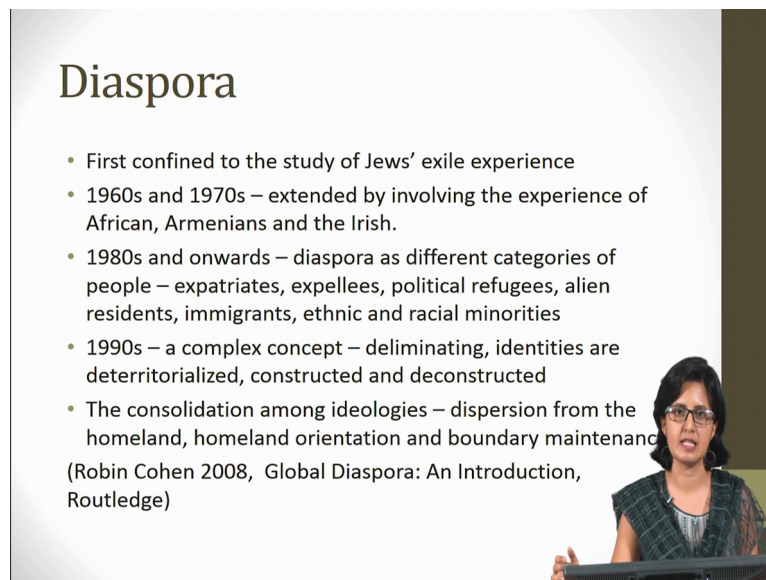


Introduction to World Literature
Professor Merin Simi Raj
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
The Third and the final Continent - 2

Hello everyone, welcome to today's session of the NPTEL course, Introduction to World literature, where we take a look at some important aspects of short story, "The 3rd and final continent" by Jhumpa Lahiri. And as you know this is part of a Literature winning short story collection and this work can be situated within the larger body of writing now known as Diaspora, Diasporic studies.

(Refer Slide Time: 0:38)



Diaspora

- First confined to the study of Jews' exile experience
- 1960s and 1970s – extended by involving the experience of African, Armenians and the Irish.
- 1980s and onwards – diaspora as different categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities
- 1990s – a complex concept – delimiting, identities are deterritorialized, constructed and deconstructed
- The consolidation among ideologies – dispersion from the homeland, homeland orientation and boundary maintenance

(Robin Cohen 2008, Global Diaspora: An Introduction, Routledge)

I would like to take you through the history and background of the term Diaspora and how I would like to situate this term in our discussions today. The term Diaspora was 1st confined to the study of Jews and their experience in exile. But from 1960s and 70s we find the term undergoing a lot of change and the term getting used in different other context. In this space work the framework that I am providing now in terms of the chronology and historical background from Robin Cohen 2008 work global Diaspora Routledge publication.

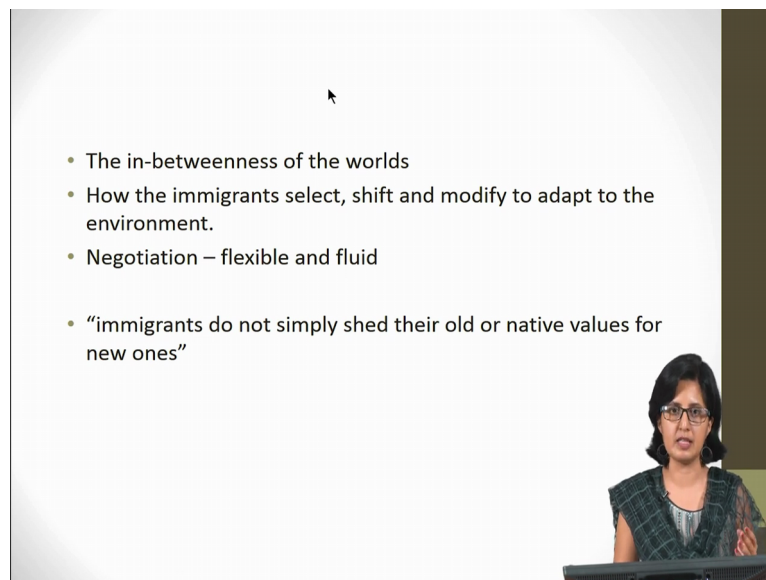
And in the 1960s and 70s when this idea of the Diaspora get extended, it also involves the experience of the Africans, Armenians and the Irish, it gets a larger context, larger connection to talk about. And from the 1980s almost be find that the Diaspora extends itself, it becomes an inclusive category to include different category of people such as expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, so it becomes a

handy term to talk about many things in the context of the post coloniality as well. And as an offshoot of 1990s, we find this emerging as a particularly complex concept if you are familiar with the postcolonial writings of the contemporary, we know that Diaspora studies and Diaspora writing is a significant part of significant component of postcolonial writings and postcolonial experiences.

So in the 1990s, the complexity involved with Diaspora studies the concept of Diaspora, the changing ways in which the paradigms of Diaspora studies get define. It also begins to be seen as a delimiting category where identities are deterritorialized, constructed and deconstructed. And in the contemporary when we talk about Diaspora or the studies related to Diaspora or when we are talking about Diaspora community which is represented in any work of writing, we are also talking about consolidation of many ideologies. We are talking about 3 major things under which most of the experiences of the Diaspora could be included; one is the dispersion from the homeland, 2 homeland orientation and boundary maintenance.

So at the end of the discussion of this short story, it is important for us to think about where we would like to situate the Diaspora experience that is being manifest (())(3:16) in Lahiri Short story, “The 3rd and final continent”.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:21)

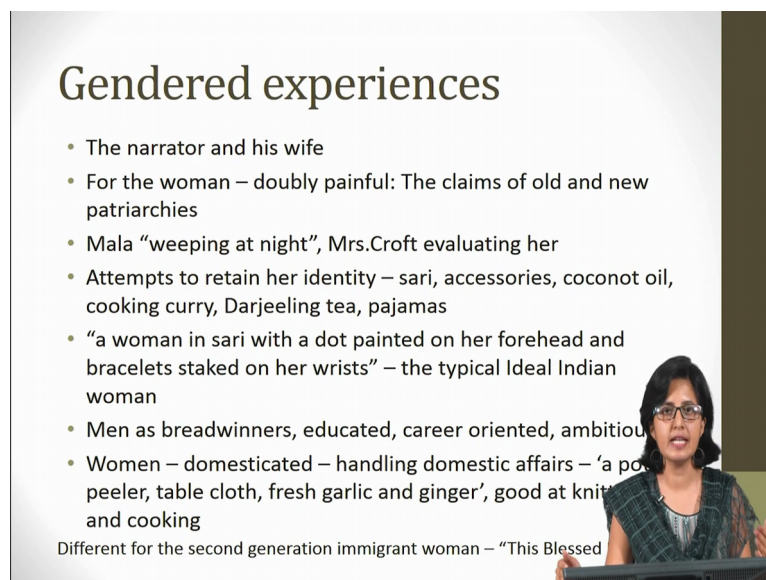


In Diasporic world, what we are introduced to is in between of the worlds, it is about how the immigrants select, shift and modify to adapt to a certain environment that they choose to live in, they choose to immigrate to. So there is a kind of negotiation which happens, the flexible and the fluid at the same time, and with this short story “The last and final continent” we do

realise that this flexibility and fluidity, it makes the narrative very simple, but it also exposes the complexity the complex concept which are underlying the idea of the Diaspora and also defines and redefine the aspects of Diasporic studies. Immigrants do not simply shed their old or native values for new ones, so this is something that we noticed throughout in this short story and in some of the other short stories from the same collection.

And we realise that the narrator, the nameless narrator in the short story “the 3rd and final continent” whether it is narrator or the people associated with him particularly become across his wife as another important character who is undergoing this process. We find that they do not shed their old and native values with new ones, but on the contrary we find things getting changed when it comes to the second-generation immigrants.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:40)



Gendered experiences

- The narrator and his wife
- For the woman – doubly painful: The claims of old and new patriarchies
- Mala “weeping at night”, Mrs.Croft evaluating her
- Attempts to retain her identity – sari, accessories, coconut oil, cooking curry, Darjeeling tea, pajamas
- “a woman in sari with a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets staked on her wrists” – the typical Ideal Indian woman
- Men as breadwinners, educated, career oriented, ambitious
- Women – domesticated – handling domestic affairs – ‘a potato peeler, table cloth, fresh garlic and ginger’, good at knitting and cooking

Different for the second generation immigrant woman – “This Blessed

The story has been talked about in a number of ways, it is being seen as one of the exemplary works which in a very simple (0)(4:47) has represented and has narrated the Diasporic the experiences of emigrants, but towards strikes me is very significant is the general experience is that, but what strikes me as extremely significant is the diasporic experience also becoming a general experience. We are introduced to the narrative in the beginning and halfway through the story, you know the wife also wife Mala also joins him in America. So was the narrator’s is not the 1st Diasporic experience, the 2nd one the 1st one being in London and in the 2nd one he is a man, a married man working in Boston in America.

And for the woman, for Mala who joins the narrator who continues to be nameless, for Mala who joins narrator in Boston is a double (0)(5:39) experience because she has to deal with

the claims of old and new patriarchies. And if you remember earlier in the story when he talks about the 1st 5 days that they spent together in Calcutta soon after the wedding and before he flies to Boston, we find the story telling us that Mala was weeping at night thinking about her parents and we do not find the narrator reaching out to her or making an effort to console her. On the contrary he is trying to deal with the Diasporic experience that awaits him, he is perhaps going through a guidebook which will perhaps help him fit better in this new place in America in Boston.

And also at a later point when Mala meets Mrs Croft for the 1st time, we find her evaluating here literary sizing her, Mala is there in a saree and that is an attire that is a, there is certain limit that the story also tells that the narrator almost regrets to for having offered to take her out because he did not want her to go out, appear with him in such an outlandish attire. But in any case when Mrs Croft evaluates her and says that she is nice and says that she likes her, we find the narrator becoming happy, and we find that a new kind of bonding also begins to develop between the husband and wife in the time when she is found to be good in someone else eyes, especially in Mrs Croft's eyes.

We too find Mala going through a rather a delicate situation though the story does not tell us that directly and Mala does not seem to mind that either and nevertheless she is someone who has to perhaps continually change herself and continually become stay aware of the claims of the new and old patriarchies. And Mala nevertheless attempts to retain her identity in multiple ways because the only identity that she possesses, the only identity through which she made this migration when she transformed herself into as an immigrant was because of this identity that she possesses as the narrator's wife.

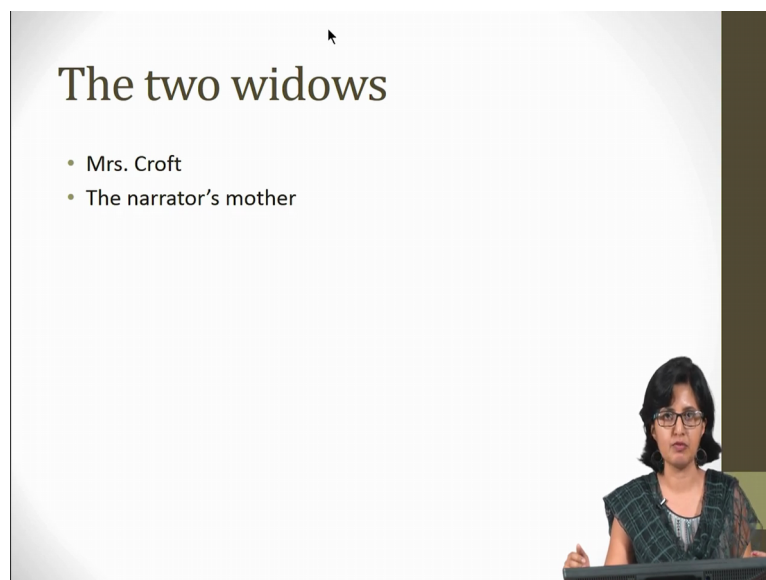
So she attempts to retain her identity, her personal identity in multiple ways which is either wearing a sari or by using the right kind of accessories are coconut oil, the cooking curry and the way she disowns oxtails soup in the flight and then how she brings Darjeeling tea every time she goes back to Calcutta and then the pajamas. And we get to know that there is a certain way in which he tries to retain the identity and its authentic roots in multiple ways. And this is the way she gets described, a woman in saree with a red tort painted on her forehead and bracelets staked on her wrists, so this is a typical ideal Indian woman that Mala is and we do not find the story deliberately trying to question that at all.

Of course that is an interesting narrative strategy that shows are how ingrained these things are and both the narrator and Mala irrespective of this new experience in a different country.

And we also find this diacot working out perfectly well that the men continues to remain as the breadwinner, the educated, the career oriented, the ambitious one who feds in a particular way into this new fabric of the nation, new fabric of the new country they have moved. But the woman Mala continues to be domesticated, she has she proved herself as a very adapt in handling domestic affairs, if you recall this instance halfway through the story when they started living together in Boston, she goes out to buy a potato peeler, tablecloth, fresh garlic and ginger and we also get to know that she is good at knitting and cooking.

Even after having spent 30 odd years in Boston, we find the narrator telling us that she still cries occasionally at night thinking about her son this time who is away studying in Harvard. So this also tells us about how her subjectivity remains pretty much bounded to the domestic affairs and this is hardly a different identity that she finds for herself throughout this process of 3 decades. And the narrator is talking about the ways in which he found himself in limited ways in this new city to which he has migrated, we find Mala pretty much remaining the same self with a few things changing about her, she has stopped covering her head, the narrator tells us and a few things about the way she carries herself has changed, otherwise she remains essentially this woman who remains at home taking care of domestic affairs.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:05)

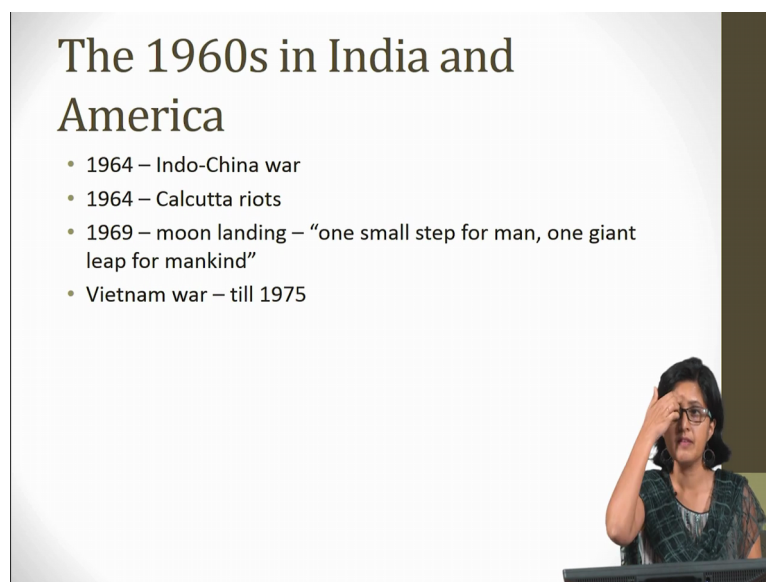


And this is essentially, this also becomes essentially different for second-generation immigrant woman Lahiri's own story the Blessed house which is part of the same collection tells us about that experience as well. The story also introduces us to two widows; Mrs Croft who emerges as the strong American woman with strong traditional values, but she also had managed to raise her daughter almost single-handedly and she continues to take care of her

when we wait her 1st in the story, even though she is about more than 100 year-old. On the other hand, we find the narrator thinking about his old mother who is widowed when he was just about 16 years old and we find the narrator telling us that the mother almost went in same (())(11:33) there is no way she could have handled that and she did not handle it well at all.

So we find the narrator making this comparison between Mrs Croft who manages to lead a strong life in America and the narrator's mother who literally crumbles down and continues to lead miserable life after her husband's death. And this is also important in situating the Diasporic experience, the way they begin to see, the way the narrator begins to see the different ways in which different experiences are being responded to in these 2 countries samay the one country that he has left behind, the culture that he has left behind and the other one that he is now part of, but not able to entirely embrace either.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:17)



But if you take a closer look at the story, you get to know that the story begins in the 1960s particularly in 1964. 1964 is the year when the narrator leaves for London from Calcutta, he spends his students years there and then he gets a job in Boston in America, he comes back to Calcutta, gets married to Mala and then leaves for Boston again. We get to know that Mala also joins him in another few months' time, so I want to draw your attention that the time period where this is set. 1964 is also an event for time in India and America, in India we find that Indo-China what is happening to which the short story does not mention at all.

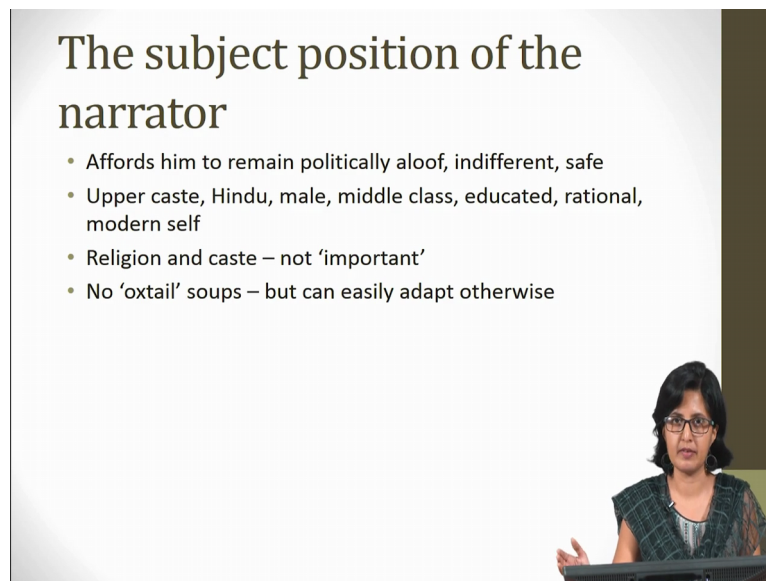
And more importantly the narrator who is leaving from Calcutta does not tells us about the politics, the Calcutta riots which is happening back home. The intention is not to draw

attention to the things that the story does not talk about, but I wanted to think about the ways in which there is a selection of events which are happening here. The moon landing of course is the part of the story in a way in which he begins his conversation with Mrs Croft, but this story chooses to tell us about this iconic event in human history, the Neil Armstrong step on Moon, one giant leap for mankind. And the story continues to talk about the event of moon land, it becomes an important image.

And when the story ends we find the narrator comparing himself to the astronauts and even feeling much much better about himself the way he has journey through these 3 continents, and the fact that the story chooses to talk about the event of moon landing which is sense politics, which does not really call for any personal investment from the narrator's side to think about politics in any strong terms, and he finds it convenient to omit perhaps events such as Indo-China War, the Calcutta riots and even the Vietnam war which happens in America and goes onto 1975, we know that it started after 1955 and then it went on for years.

And when the narrator is spending his time in America, America is going through a turbulent time, it is also being criticised for its policies as part of the Vietnam war but the story chooses to stay away from all of these things rather we have a narrator who chooses to stay away from all of these things. So what does that tell us about the narrator? And this is something the details that he chooses to omit, I find it is extremely useful in understanding the subject precisely that this narrator chooses to inhibit.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:12)



The slide features a title 'The subject position of the narrator' in a large, dark font. Below the title is a bulleted list of four points. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small inset image of a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top, who appears to be presenting the slide.

The subject position of the narrator

- Affords him to remain politically aloof, indifferent, safe
- Upper caste, Hindu, male, middle class, educated, rational, modern self
- Religion and caste – not 'important'
- No 'oxtail' soups – but can easily adapt otherwise

We get to know lots of things about the narrator, we do not know his name, we know the kinds of steps that he made at different points of time to make it begin his career, we know that he left Calcutta, he left India as a very young man and he then managed to live a life a full life, a successful life, a contemporary life in Boston in America. So what is it about the narrator's subject possession that efforts him to remain politically aloof, indifferent and safe. We are being introduced to a very smooth migration experience, here we find that the narrator feels very proud of himself that he left his homeland and he travels to two new continents which were alien to him. But what is hard to miss is also the fact that when he 1st arrived in London, there was a certain familiar setting already waiting for him.

So to speak we find him talking about the other Bengali bachelors with whom he shared food, a similar space and a lot of shared things which are already there available for him, just have to go and inhabit that by choosing this subject possession. And we are also given to understand the narrator while continues nameless, he is an upper Upper caste, Hindu, male, middle-class, educated, rational, modern self, how do we get to the about the castedness of the self that is through the right choice that at least his wife makes and about his rational self. We also get to know that though she chooses to marry this woman, he also wants to portray himself as a modern man and he also chooses to pursue modern occupation, he wants to enjoy all the benefits of the modern world.

And towards the end we find him refree talking about his son and they think that he may stop having rice and may stop talking in Bengali after they have gone. And there is a way in which

he is willing to let that go as well and that is that part of this self, the one that aspires to be modern but continues traditional enough so that they do not have oxtail soup in the flight. So for this self which this narrator embodies, religion and caste are not important at all. On the other hand, they can easily adapt to the modern situations whenever there is a need to. The situation of this narrator, the subject position that he embodies is very important in understanding the Diasporic world of this short story within the framework of the postcolonial period as well.

So in the following session where we try to take up a closer look at the story, when we try to read the story together by paying attention to the particular details and the techniques through which the narrator is being presented to ask, we have to have more discussion in related terms. So I hope you will be more similar with this story by the time we read it together in the next session, I encourage you to access the story and do the reading by yourself before we start discussing this part of the session, thank you for listening and we look forward to see you in the next session.