

# **REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA**

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## **Lecture 45**

### **Lecture 45: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in *Bride and Prejudice***

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugees, Migration, and Diaspora. So, we are discussing cinema and diaspora, and today's topic is the film *Bride and Prejudice*. So, we will talk about transnationalism, transculturalism, as well as hybridity through our reading of *Bride and Prejudice*. Now, migration and diaspora have been pivotal in maintaining ties and interactions across national borders.

These phenomena have propelled the exchange and movement of people, cultures, as well as capital. When we talk about the movement of capital across borders, we are not only talking about money or economic capital but also the movement of cultural capital. What happens with globalization is that people get closer to one another's culture; people from different parts of the world become familiar with one another's culture due to the availability of commodities from different regions and people's increasing knowledge and awareness about these commodities. What happens is that lifestyle itself becomes more multicultural, and we have more choices, right?

So, there are more options. There is a greater number of choices, and human life as such becomes more flexible with multiculturalism and transnationalism, with these movements beyond national borders. So, in recent decades, the globalized world has witnessed many interesting forms of hybridities, interactions, and new connections among people and institutions across national borders. And these connections are in terms of social, cultural, political, and economic exchanges. So, this spread of economic, political, and cultural processes beyond national borders can be referred to as transnationalism.

**Introduction**

- Migration and diaspora have been **pivotal in maintaining ties and interactions across national borders**. They have propelled the exchange and **movement of people, cultures and capital**. In the recent decades, the globalised world has witnessed interactions and new connections between people and institutions from across national borders in terms of **social, cultural, political and economic exchanges**
- This spread of economic, political and cultural process beyond national borders is referred to as **transnationalism**.





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According to Alvaro Lima, who is a director of research for the Boston Planning and Development Agency, such transnational interactions promote multiculturalism and greatly influence the migrant diaspora's view of community and personal identity. So, we see that community and personal identity constantly interact with each other. One shapes the other, and neither of these is constant or permanent, nor do they have anything natural about them. So, just like a community or culture is in a state of flux, constantly picking up new elements and discarding practices deemed redundant,

similarly, personal identity is constantly being deconstructed and reconstructed. So, interactions across national borders also make it more likely that immigrants will continue to be involved in the economic, social, and political spheres of their native countries, right? So, the new experiences and practices that migrants bring with them or acquire also go on to shape their respective native countries' basic culture and overall culture, right? So, the diaspora community, the immigrant population, has a significant impact on their respective countries' social and political practices, as well as their economic scenarios.



So, critic Roland Robertson has explained globalization as, I quote Robertson, 'the process of the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole,' unquote. The term globalization became popular during the 1990s as a way of explaining migrant diasporas, complicated economic relations, and culturally mixed communities that increasingly characterized the making of the modern world. In a globalized world, transnationalism has affected the conventional notion of nations. People, cultures, economies, and identities are now more interconnected than ever before.

Hence, we see as a consequence blurring of the boundaries of nations. So, in a postmodern world, nation as a category which is already not something very old is in

some ways, you know, rendered redundancy because human life has become transnational in nature. Human life knows better than nation and national borders. They are constantly traversing across the borders and the pure categories called nations, right?

### Cultural Hybridity

- In this globalised world, **transnationalism** has affected the **conventional notion of nations**. The people, cultures, economies and identities are now more interconnected than they were before, hence **blurring the boundaries of nations**. Businesses and people are now operating on a global scale. **Nations no longer govern their people and economies independently** due to the flow of money and people, along with culture and ideas
- In the postmodern situation, economic powers have reached the point of imperiling the stability of the State through new forms of the circulation of capital through multinational corporations. These new forms of circulation imply that investment decisions have, at least in part, passed beyond the control of the nation-states

  
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Businesses and people are now operating on a global scale. So nations no longer govern the people and economies independently due to the flow of money and people alongside culture and ideas. So people, money, culture, ideas, these are flowing and flowing at a very fast pace. The world has become small, as we say, and

it is not very difficult due to a very sophisticated, you know, communication methods. It could be human commuting from one part of the globe to another. It could be the communication, the transference or transmission of news or information through social media. Thanks to all these technological developments, the world is now small, people are more well connected, and culture and ideas do not grow in isolation anymore. They are constantly picking up from different borders, from different directions,

and so nations as pure, watertight categories do not hold in a way. So in the postmodern situation, we see that economic powers have reached the point of destabilizing or imperiling the stability of the category of nation-state through new forms of circulation of capital through the MNCs or the multinational corporations. These new forms of circulation imply that investment decisions have at least to an extent passed beyond the control of the nation states. So, the speed of life, the fastness of life, the technological advancements, the technological boom and the rate at which we receive and we transmit information-

### Cultural Hybridity

- In this globalised world, **transnationalism** has affected the **conventional notion of nations**. The people, cultures, economies and identities are now more interconnected than they were before, hence **blurring the boundaries of nations**. Businesses and people are now operating on a global scale. **Nations no longer govern their people and economies independently** due to the flow of money and people, along with culture and ideas
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all these factors in a postmodern situation defy human life to remain the same for too long. So it has become quite kind of, we could say, malleable. Life has become more protean in a way, more flexible, acquiring new elements at all times. So, reopening of the world market, a return to vigorous economic competition, then breakdown of the hegemony of American capitalism, as well as decline of the socialist alternative are some of the major postmodern conditions that humanity today faces. The new way of organizing and managing resources and people is not based on national boundaries, therefore.

So, this has led to a mixed up and diverse world with distinct cultures and different places often simultaneously, you know, creating familiar and unfamiliar geography. So at any given point in time, what we experience in terms of space is, you know, at the same time, a familiar and unfamiliar geography. The world is starting to look, you know, similar in a way, the metropolitan cities across the globe are very similar in a way. The experience of living in a metropolitan city is not very different regardless of whether we are sitting in India somewhere in Delhi or Mumbai or we are sitting in London or New York.

So, this sameness is also a product and offshoot of globalization. Now, critic Mekkonen Tesfahuney refers to transculturality as spaces of hybridity and multiplicity, resembling a collage of differences. Prefiguring new geographies as an amalgamation of the near and the far, the familiar and the strange. So, what happens as a result of transculturality, according to Tesfahuney, is the formation of hybrid people, experiences, and spaces. So, we see postmodern critics

like Jean Baudrillard talking about the optical illusion, you know, where the nearness and the farness cannot be distinguished after a point. So, thanks to the media, if a war is going on somewhere in West Asia or the Middle East, we are getting all the details, you know,

all the correspondences from that part of the geography to an extent that after a point it doesn't seem very strange or unfamiliar to the audience, you know, facing social media from across different parts of the globe. So, there is a kind of optical illusion where there are no pure spaces or pure identities in terms of far and near. There is a kind of sameness that pervades, in a way, similar kinds of situations, right?

So, this is a product of transculturality where the spaces are essentially hybrid and the spaces are simultaneous and, you know, multiple in nature. They are holding, at the same time, several meanings, right? Now, coming to cinema, how cinema celebrates this hybridity and transculturalism. We note that cinema plays an important role in both reflecting and contributing to socio-economic and cultural interactions. As Andrew Higson, who is a professor of Film and Television, states, I quote Higson here: 'The media are vital to the argument that modern nations are imagined communities.'

But contemporary media activity is also clearly one of the main ways in which transnational cultural connections are established. So, not only are nations imagined communities, as Benedict Anderson has already professed through his very well-known essay, but we also see that media plays a vital role in connecting the world, you know, creating cultural connections that run beyond national borders, right? where new scopes of interconnections and new identifiers are created that are not restricted to older social categories, right? Nation being one of them, right?

So, media plays a vital role in cross-cultural connections and cross-cultural identifications. Now, diasporic cinema crosses the boundaries of nations in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition, as well as in terms of thematic and formal cultural representations of distinct identities in the narrative of the film. So, diasporic cinema greatly supports the concept of transnationalism as a way of creating a diasporic film. The production, distribution, and exhibition have to, as a way of creating a diasporic film, move beyond the borders. And we also see that there is a great deal to unpack in terms of the heterogeneity of themes and forms, such that diasporic film becomes a rich ground for unfurling new possibilities and for new experimentation.

### Cultural Hybridity and Cinema

- **Diasporic cinema crosses the boundaries of nations in terms of production, distribution and exhibition, as well as in terms of thematic and formal cultural representations of distinct identities in the narrative of the film, therefore relating to the concept of transnationalism.**
- E. O. Aldea (2011) explains that Tony Blair's promotion of "Cool Britannia" – to showcase the British multicultural identity – resulted in the emergence of several films and TV productions by diasporic filmmakers such as Gurinder Chadha in the 1990s and 2000s, exploring the experiences of British-Asian diasporic community.



Now, critic E.O. Aldea explains that Tony Blair's promotion of "Cool Britannia" as a way of showcasing British multicultural identity resulted in the emergence of several films and television productions by diasporic filmmakers, such as Gurinder Chadha and the like, who have been exploring the experiences of the British Asian diasporic community since the 1990s and 2000s. So, during this period, the turn of the 21st century, we see diasporic filmmakers making various films that depict the experiences of the British Asian diasporic community. These films include *Bhaji on the Beach*, produced in 1993, and *Bend It Like Beckham*, which came out in 2002.

Both these films are by Gurinder Chadha: *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Bend It Like Beckham*. Then we have a film like *East Is East*, which came out in 1999, made by Damien O'Donnell. And *Goodness Gracious Me*, which came out as a successful television show in a series. It came out in series first in 1998, followed by 2000 and 2001. And it was created by the BBC.

So all these different experimentations happened with the representation of the British and Asian diasporic experiences happening at the turn of the century in the 1990s and early 2000s. So Chadha stands out as one of the most popular diasporic filmmakers, portraying diasporic experiences on screen. Her films, such as *Bend It Like Beckham*, in 2002 and *Bride and Prejudice* in 2004, are excellent examples of transnational cinema as well as transnationality.

Films like *Bride and Prejudice* wonderfully celebrate the concepts of transnationality, cultural hybridity, and transculturality. *Bride and Prejudice*, which is a romantic comedy-drama, is a rendition of Jane Austen's classic tale, revolving around the life of Mrs. Bakshi and her eagerness to find suitable husbands for her four daughters. The film stars Aishwarya Rai Bachchan as Lalitha Bakshi in the lead, with American actor Martin

Henderson in the role of Mr. Darcy, along with Anupam Kher, who plays Mr. Bakshi. The film received funding from the UK Film Council and was distributed by Pathé Distribution in France and Miramax Films in the US.

So, the film reflects the plot and characters of the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which came out in 1813. Both the novel and the filmic adaptation handle a similar major theme of marriage. So, at the heart of both the original novel and its filmic adaptation is the question of a girl's marriage to a good suitor. So, the plot begins with the introduction of the Bakshi family, which resembles the Bennett family in the original novel and the Bakshi family in the case of the film is located in Amritsar, India. It has a central character named Lalitha Bakshi played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan who parallels Elizabeth also called Lizzy in the novel.

Her mother Mrs. Bakshi played by Nadira Babbar resembles Mrs. Bennet and we see that this mother is obsessed with marrying her daughters and defending her family's social status. So in the case of the novel we see that Elizabeth is more concerned with her class but here Lalitha the protagonist is additionally also concerned with her family values as well as the values represented by her country and this is more pronounced in the face of the ignorant and scornful American William Darcy played by Martin Henderson. The filmic pastiche closely follows the original subplots of the novel including elopement and romances of Lalitha's other sisters, so, Lakhi Bakshi played by Peeva Rai Chowdhury

elopes with Johnny Wickham resembling the elopement of Lydia with George Wickham, and we see that Darcy helps Lalita in finding her sister Lakhi. So this episode itself subsequently brings the two people, Lalita and Darcy, close to each other by changing their perspectives about each other, and the enemies, they are initially enemies, but they eventually turn into lovers, and this trope of enemies turning into lovers has also been used in the original novel by Jane Austen.

*Bride and Prejudice*

- Lalita also defends her family and country, rather than only her class as in the novel, in the face of the ignorant and scornful American William Darcy (Martin Henderson)
- The filmic pastiche closely follows the original subplots, including elopement and romances of other sisters.
- Lakhi Bakshi (Peeva Rai Chowdhary) elopes with Jonny Wickham, resembling the elopement of Lydia with George Wickham, and Darcy helps Lalita to find Lakhi. This episode subsequently brings the two close by changing their perspective on each other and enemies are eventually turned into lovers, a trope also used by Austen








Image source: imdb



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The adaptation of the English classic with Indian and American characters and the cast in a globalized setting not only breaks temporal boundaries, but also comes out of fixed geographical grids in a way. In the words of the director, Hollywood and Bollywood tied in British sensibility. So she is bringing in the best of the Hollywood and the Bollywood elements and they are commonly tied in British sensibility. Why British sensibility? Because a lot of Indianness also, the modern Indianness, the post-colonial Indianness as we know it, is shaped by, is informed by India's experience of colonization.

So, there are in a way a lot of commonality, a lot of commonness between the British experience of different aspects of life and the Indian aspects. So this is because we are tied to Britain in a way or we are beholden to Britain in a way owing to the colonial past that we have a lot of our education, our mannerisms have been shaped through our colonial experience. So, the film could also be interpreted as the site where the categories of genre and nation have been time and again contested in a process that aims to create a new hybrid outcome. So, there is no tying down to one national identity or one generic formula as such.

This constant outflowing or outgrowing of genre and nation results in new hybrid outcomes, new interesting experiments, basically. So, critic Joe Parnell suggests that Bollywood reflects as a lingua franca because the films are shown not just located or inhabiting the space and culture of regions; it could be Panjab, it could be Bengal or Rajasthan or other parts of India. Rather, Bollywood is more interested in reflecting, in celebrating the diaspora communities across the world. So, more and more of the diaspora elements are being incorporated into Bollywood.

And although we see that a family, a particular family, hails from a region of India. It could be Punjab or Bengal. Their characteristics and practices are essentially very



globalized, very well connected to the rest of the world. So they don't seem to bear or carry the essentialist thread or the essentialist burden of the region they come from.

This Bollywood-style film, *Bride and Prejudice*, blurs many cultural boundaries and in a similar manner. So, along with the film's settings on three continents, the film actually travels or narrates across three continents: Europe, North America, and Asia. Furthermore, it also crosses national boundaries in terms of production and distribution. So, the film is a Bollywood-style adaptation of the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, which came out in 1813, with Bollywood musicals that are played in both English and Hindi or Punjabi.

**Transnationality in *Bride and Prejudice***

- Joe Parnell (2021) suggests that Bollywood reflects as a *lingua franca* because the films are shown not just in Punjab, Bengal and other Indian regions, but also in diaspora communities across the world.
- This Bollywood-style film **blurs many cultural boundaries**. Along with the film's **settings on three continents** – Europe, North America, and Asia – it also **crosses national boundaries in terms of production and distribution**
- The film is a Bollywood-style **adaptation of the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)** with Bollywood musicals in both English and Hindi (Punjabi)




Image source: IMDb

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The characters display diverse transnational characteristics. So, characters such as Balraj, played by Naveen Andrews, and Mr. Kohli, played by Nitin Ganatra, represent non-resident Indians (NRIs), overseas Indians, as well as diaspora communities, and they maintain strong ties with their home culture. In the opening dance sequence, Balraj, who is a British Indian barrister and a second-generation British immigrant, displays his connection to his Indian roots by showing his prowess as a Bhangra dancer—how well he can dance the Bhangra—and his willingness to dance with the wedding party. On the other hand, the character Mr. Kohli, who is a Silicon Valley-based NRI, aspires to have a typical traditional Indian wife. The film displays cultural hybridity through various elements, including the presentation of the characters, the depiction in the form of music, and themes.

Protagonist Lalita, played by Aishwarya Rai, is the South Asian counterpart of the classic heroine Elizabeth Bennet. And she reflects a hybrid identity on multiple occasions. She lives a traditional life at home. However, we see that when she visits Los Angeles, which is similar to Lizzie's visit to Pemberley, Lalita effortlessly transforms herself according to

the American lifestyle. Her switching between Indian and Western dresses demonstrates her position as a modern Indian woman.

And this switch from ethnic clothing and habits to Western clothing and habits allows her beauty—the actor's beauty—to be presented and displayed in different cultural modes. William Darcy, played by Martin Henderson, is an American hotel owner, and he reflects a hybrid identity conforming to the film's plot. The entire narrative is about how Darcy overcomes his prejudices against Indian culture and ultimately adapts to the Bakshi family. So, Darcy shows his snobbish character. By rejecting the dance request, he outrightly rejects it as a scornful man, and he even gets irritated by the overwhelming hospitality of the hosts from the Indian family.

He complains about the provincials, the noise, and the pollution, among other things. So, initially, we see that he is unable to adapt to Indian culture and its habits and practices. He simply gets irritated. However, by the end of the film, he is transformed. So, Darcy, we see that he learns to play the dhol.



And he marries an Indian woman in a lavish Indian style. So, he has this desire to explore the real India. He is lured by a hospitable, attractive, real India, which is modern in its outlook yet maintains its family and cultural values. So, cultural hybridity is also explicit in the film through the musicals. The musical numbers are performed by an African-American singer named Ashanti, who intermingles both Eastern and Western rhythms.

So, through the incorporation of music by this African-American singer Ashanti, Gurinder Chadha has paid homage to the Bollywood tradition, where many times we see the cameo appearance of a celebrity, usually in item numbers, taking place without any direct involvement in the plot. So, this concept of item numbers, sometimes, you know,

becoming bigger than the filmic narrative itself, is something very common in Bollywood. So, the item numbers—these musicals—have their own fate, their own destiny to pursue, and sometimes they are remembered in isolation or regardless of the film. Sometimes the film doesn't work, but these songs, these item numbers,

they travel beyond the scope of Bollywood. They are embraced by the global audience, and sometimes it happens even if the film itself, from which the musical originally came, tends to be forgotten. So, the use of song and dance as an alternative narrative system defines Bollywood cinema. The colorful musicals, the item numbers, have their own lives to live.

So the colorful item numbers in Bollywood cinema have their own lives to live and their own destinies to pursue. Now, Gurinder Chadha's work not only highlights contemporary cultural identities, but also has elements of hybridity packed into the narrative. It shows the post-colonial notions of mimicry and ambivalence which have been described by Homi Bhabha. For historical reasons, we see that the formerly colonized Indian people see canonical English literature as part of their own cultural legacy. So this is something I was talking about.

The British Asian culture has a lot of British elements already emerging from their own home country values owing to the colonial legacy, the colonial past they have experienced. So, in many ways, the Indian and the British values are tied together. They are not very different from one another. Apart from its popularity as a cultural hybrid film, *Bride and Prejudice* has also been criticized for reducing Bollywood into stereotypes. And this has happened time and again where the diaspora films have used Indian traditions, Indian practices and beliefs differently

in the form of stereotypes, in very exotic fashion, so Indians and their cultures have been exoticized and romanticized quite problematically in the way they are presented before the global audience. So, there is a problematic way of presenting the Indian practices altogether. It could be the Indian wedding, the Indian clothing or even as basic as representation of the Indian family values. However, a movie like *Bride and Prejudice* all the same stands out as a distinct example of cultural hybridity, and it is considered as a very successful artwork in terms of the cultural experimentations it has made and it has been able to achieve. With this, we come to the end of our lecture here today.

Let us meet for a new topic and a new round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.

