

Alienation and Disillusionment Portrayed Through the Mirror of Diaspora and Globalization in Hary Kunzru's *Transmission*

Jarin Tasnim Elahi

Department of English, Leading University, Sylhet, Bangladesh

Email address:

jtelahi@lus.ac.bd

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Abstract: From the beginning of civilization people have shifted from one place to another for better living and for seeking different opportunities. It is true that globalization is changing this world to a small village but people are becoming more and more forlorn and alienated. In most of the third world countries, western world is considered to be a better place to live in; this leads to disillusionment in several of the cases. Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* deals with a character named Arjun Mehta, a programmer, who goes to America to pursue his dreams in the corporate world. Soon he learns he is just a contract employee despite all his capabilities. His largest blow comes when he realizes his job life is about to end. He is isolated though he is surrounded by people and co-workers. To prove his worth, he creates a virus which generated a global havoc. The writer very skilfully introduces another character named Guy Swift whose life goes parallel to Arjun. Unlike Arjun, Guy enjoys all the luxuries of the world; the contrast is perplexing. The virus which Arjun created affected Guy's life too, showing the smallness of this world and how everything more or less affects everyone. Hary Kunzru tactfully put Guy in a situation where he was deported to another country due to a confusion regarding his identity; the writer has turned the table and showed how it can be when one person is not from a powerful country. Our world does not treat everyone equally: in this globalized world, people are alienated and are given false hope. Arjun lost his identity and his sense of home: he did not have any place to belong. This paper has worked with the disenchantment of Arjun and how his life changed by going to America. This paper has discussed about the brutal world of materialism where people are considered just as a working body: with no feelings whatsoever. The borders are said to be vanishing but people are becoming more and more depressed and lonely. Everyone wants to leave a mark, everyone wants to be noticed like Arjun but most of the times they go unnoticed. This paper has tried to discuss the reason behind these crises and hoped to come up with some answers.

Keywords: Diaspora, Alienation, Identity Crisis, Globalization, Disillusionment

1. Introduction

Human beings crave for something better, something they do not possess. Their success is never satisfactory: always wanting more. Place is a huge factor in the measurement of success. Most of the people worship first world countries. For them, living in a first world country is considered to be a blessing. This thinking is actually a part of globalization: it makes people believe that they live in a global village but ultimately it does not end up like a fairy-tale for everyone. In "Globalisation—A Human Rights Perspective" C Sheela Reddy pointed this out as, "It is a blessing for people

benefiting from the new opportunities. At the same time others are being left behind in poverty" [9]. The change of countries does not necessarily end up as rewarding for everyone. Many people, after leaving their countries, realize how close they were to their country. Estrangement, disappointment, identity crisis and home sickness, all come as a package with the reallocation of one's dear homeland. These things happen because most of the first world countries never consider migrants or immigrants to be their own. Generation passes but people feel the same kind of hollowness as their ancestors may have felt. Iwona Filipczak talked about this while discussing *Transmission* in

“Immigrant to a Terrorist: On Liquid Fears in Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*”, he said, “Immigrants are ‘Others’ perceived stereotypically as an economic danger for the nation” [2]. These “others” can hardly touch the feelings of anyone because nowadays people are always moving. The rapid movement barely gives the people a chance to think about their surrounding and the process of bonding and for that reason people feel alienated: as Iwona Filipczak emphasised, “the current speed of changes taking place in our everyday reality, linked with the constant movement, constant flow of people, goods and information on an unprecedented scale, which results in an inability to preserve stable forms of social life and frequently individual life” [2]. Though globalization made this world a global village, which tells everyone that the world is interconnected, true connection is neglected in most of the scenarios. Everyone is ironically connected to everyone else: willingly or unwillingly contributing to someone’s story. Oddly enough, this does not mean people are becoming one: they are more or less becoming more and more separated from one another.

2. Methodology

In this review article, the secondary materials were searched through Google Scholar and JSTOR. This paper used books, articles, interviews, journals and many other secondary materials. The searched terms which were selected to find the secondary materials were: diaspora, depression, anxiety, psychological issues arising from materialism, alienation, identity crisis, globalization, disillusionment, job crisis and so on.

3. Discussion

Transmission starts with the story of Arjun Mehta who is a young Indian boy full of dreams. He moves to America to pursue his career as a programmer. The agency which sent him to America showed him false hope. Soon he realizes he is just a “cheap slave” in the corporate world. Though he is an educated skilled man, he is given contract works regarding computer issues once in a while. After struggling for some time, he gets his dream job in a company only to be cut off soon enough as the company faces some economic crisis. To prove his worth, Arjun releases a virus by thinking he can solve the problem and can be a hero. The plot takes a dramatic twist from there as the virus becomes a global threat and instead of becoming a hero, Arjun is now considered a terrorist. The concept of global village is very skilfully introduced by Hari Kunzru as he brings a parallel character, Guy Swift, to the story. Guy is the citizen of the first world country who, unlike Arjun, moves freely across the world and enjoys every luxury. The virus, which Arjun releases, hampers his perfect life as well showing the readers how a person can hamper someone else’s life without even meeting him. The virus does not only take Guy’s company away, it identifies him as a fugitive and deports Guy to another country making him a subject of migration, ironically.

Through Guy, Hari showed how a person can be completely attached to materialistic things and can be an alien to all kind of feelings. Guy, even though a successful entrepreneur, is unable to attach himself emotionally with Gaby who is in a relationship with him. There is another key character named Leela, who is a successful Bollywood actress and is Arjun’s dream girl: her name influenced the name of the virus which is called Leela virus. All these characters are intertwined with each other even though they are not physically in the same exact place: showing the nature of globalization. In *Globalization and Discourse on Terror: Hari Kunzru’s Transmission as post 9/11 Fiction*, Ayesha Perveen and Nadia Anwar talked about this butterfly effect of globalized world and added, “In this type of globalized world, one cannot predict the consequences of even one’s own actions” [7]. Today’s modern world is so small that even we might never know how our decisions are connected to someone else’s life.

When a person moves to another country, usually that person wishes for a better life; Arjun Mehta was no different. Arjun came from a middle class family and thinks America can solve all his problems. He believes he can give pride to his family just by moving there. In the beginning of the novel, Hari showed why people want to leave their homeland by portraying the interview scene where Arjun went for his dream job. The contrast between slums, bagger and the air conditioned office was truly mesmerizing as Arjun witnessed, “Lost in his inner retail space, he stared blankly out of the window, his eyes barely registering the low roofs of patchworked thatch and blue polythene by the roadside, the ragged children, standing under the tangle of illegally strung power-lines” [5]. Poverty does not come by chance; most third world countries are unable to provide jobs for everyone as Arjun was overwhelmed by the number of participants for the job outside the interview room. His situation was mentioned as, “But such a number of applicants? There were at least fifty people in the room. The air-conditioning system grumbled, failing to counter the heat gain from the mass of sweating job-hungry flesh” [5]. Arjun’s love for America does not show that he dislike his home country. The vast difference between economies from one country to another is responsible for the insecurity among people. Everyone wants to be established and wants to get hold of a better life style. No one wants to leave their country willingly: the constantly moving world forces people to do so. C Sheela Reddy conveyed this message by saying, “Globalization is not a choice-it is a reality that is proceeding at a relentless pace” [9]. Hari wanted to portray the feeling of a young man who feels worthless because of his surrounding and wants to prove himself. Most of the people leave their motherland just for the exact same reason. They feel the necessity to survive and to secure their place which they cannot attain in their homeland. PH. Sanamacha Sharma, in “Contesting Globalization in Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*” said, “Arjun’s lack of patriotism has nothing to do with any hatred for his home-soil. It is more to do with his need to travel abroad and be a part of the global consumer. He is taken out of his immediate locality to be submerged in a global culture” [10],

Sharma again added, "Our cultures become increasingly unstable and disposable" [10]. The need for secure lifestyle and comfort leads to Diaspora in most of the cases. Arjun's father, who never thought his son can do anything extraordinary, was proud to know that Arjun was selected for America. Suddenly, Arjun's value increased in his family. These crises are never witnessed by Guy Swift. He, as a first world country citizen, always enjoyed lavish lifestyle. The contrast between his life and Arjun's are a harsh criticism of global inequality. People like Arjun, who moves from their country, are never truly free. On the other hand, people like Guy, can shift where ever they want. Guy was introduced as, "Guy Swift, thirty three years old, UK citizen, paper millionaire and proud holder of platinum status on three different frequent flyer programs" [5]. His name, Swift, portrays his power to move anywhere and everywhere. This world gives some people the freedom to travel and takes away the freedom from some people. Ayesha Perveen and Nadia Anwar talked about few factors that fuelled the globalization and added, "...transnational cultural patterns and flows, third, international political processes, fourth, human movement leading to new migrant identities, and fifth, new structures of power, inequality and domination" [7]. Globalization is mostly spread through inequality: the difference between powerful and the common people. Unlike Guy, Arjun cannot move anywhere without the permission of the authority showing the world's rigidity on the basis of migration. This concept is explained by Iwona Filipczak as, "These two characters represent the polarization of the globalizing world: the poor Third World immigrant, whose mobility is constantly restricted, and a member of an elite global class who can move freely from one destination to another" [2]. The immigrants are considered inferior even though everyone shares a single world: the boundaries are invisible but prominent.

The illusion of success, equality and freedom which is shown by a globalized world is mostly temporary. Arjun's disillusionment came almost immediately after he reached America. He soon realizes that he has no permanent job or job security and he needs to give almost all the money to the agency that sent him there. Arjun was introduced to other immigrants who, just like him, are waiting to get a proper job. Arjun's condition was described as, "Anyone on foot in suburban California is one of four things: poor, foreign, mentally ill or jogging" [5], the writer added, "Databodies charged the companies he worked for twice, even three times what they paid him, and still deducted money from his pay for rent, legal and administrative fees. He had made no money, gained nothing at all since coming to America" [5]. The slap which Arjun got from the real world was because of the dream he was shown by the agency. They wanted him because he would be a cheap labour: American born programmers would have been very expensive. Christian Fuchs in his book, *Communication and Capitalism*, said, "In capitalism, the bodies of workers do not, like those of slaves, belong to an external owner. But given that they cannot survive without working, workers have to sell their labour

power on the labour market in order to earn wages" [3]. In this materialistic world everyone is looking for cheap labour without thinking that the workers are actually human beings. Soon Arjun realizes that this world treats everyone on the basis of their nationality. Arjun and his fellow immigrants were living a life full of uncertainty just because of their identity. They were hard working and ambitious but these things never mattered in the corporate world. No matter how hard they work and how hard they try, they will never come close to the people like Guy. PH. Sanamacha Sharma explained, "He realized that software engineers from the third world like him was being employed and exploited because it was a job without job security. He was one of the new indentured labourers in the cosmos of global technological companies" [10]. Guy was hard working as well but the difference is, his hard work was appreciated by everyone because of his identity. Though his company ran on loan his lifestyle never changed. He wasted his money on expensive gifts, apartment, office decorations and travelling which Arjun could never have dared to dream of. Guy's Apartment purchase was described as, "The price of course was astronomical, but at the time it had seemed worth taking on the debt just to see the look of envy on the faces of his contacts when he invited them over" [5]. The contrast between Guy and Arjun reflects the true nature of border. Though it has been promoted by many that the world is full of equality, on the real picture it differentiates between first world and third world people. Arjun never thought his life would be like this. He had all the proper degrees and all the enthusiasm but everything shattered after he went to America. The disillusionment came as a package of globalized world. In Globalisation and Democracy Deepak Nayyar talked about how in this globalized world few people benefit from the surrounding and few are left behind as he expressed, "Some are winners... some are losers" [6]. Now-a-days, the distance has become limited: people can move fast from one country to another but ultimately it is the power of citizenship that matters the most. Immigrants are exploited because of their visas. Same as Arjun, people feel a dread to be deported to their homeland if not worked cheap. America, a place of hope, became a place of horror for the people like Arjun as PH. Sanamacha Sharma said, "His American dream turned out to be a mirage. He suffered the pathetic condition of a man looking for a job for mere survival" [10]. The shattering of dreams, show the boundary of the prison like world where people are told to breathe but not to live.

With the crushing of hope, most people become alienated from their loved ones: Arjun was no exception. He never confessed to his family the trouble he is having. His dreams were not only his own, his family was related to that dream as well. In this material world when people start to run after money and a better lifestyle, most of the time they become separated from their own self and their loved ones: Arjun wanted to live in America in order to achieve a better future but in that journey he lost almost everything. Hary described, "Arjun would sit on the phone to India, horribly aware of the cost. The family would want to know everything, but

somehow their questions only pushed them further away from him" [5]. Arjun was in a foreign country, away from his family, new to the surrounding, was desperately lonely. Even when he got a job, he was alienated from others. For most of the people, the shift of culture, people, conventions are very hard to overcome. Although it is hard to say, exactly, for which reason the alienation came as the other people of his office were alienated too. Arjun's estrangement came from his situation but it seems that the corporate world was making others self centred, as described, "In the cafeteria, like many of his colleagues, he tended to eat alone... in his rare moments away from the cubicle he sometimes craved conversation" [5]. These people cannot be blamed for their self-centeredness: the society is not showing them mercy. Just like Arjun, everyone else is fighting their own battle of modern life. Rik Pieters in *Bidirectional Dynamics of Materialism and Loneliness: Not Just a Vicious Cycle* said, "There is a shared belief among academics and the general public that materialism contributes to loneliness and similar social ills" [8]. In this globalized world the job market is treating people like machines and for that reason many people are losing their humanly emotions. Arjun craved for human contact and was homesick; he soon developed a friendship with a fellow colleague named Chris. Here, the culture gap was prominent. Chris, though his close friend was unable to fulfil the gap he had in his life. Through their relationship Hary showed how even romantic relationships are sometimes unable to diminish the crack people have in their lives. Chris had spent one night in Arjun's apartment and this to Arjun meant a lot. To him, sleeping together means something closer to a strong commitment as he says, "It's you and me against the world now" [5]. PH. Sanamacha Sharma explained this as, "Sleeping only once is not a criterion for a strong bond. He missed this simple logic and the whole structure of his inner world came apart. Living in the global fast lane does not leave any room for cultural adjustment" [10]. Arjun never had an opportunity to mingle and to understand the differences of culture and ethics. This fast world does not give much time to people to understand the surrounding properly. Everyone is moving in a fast pace and people like Arjun are left behind confused and heartbroken as the writer said, "At least in India the street people can lie down for a while before being moved on" [5]. Not just the diaspora and globalization, the corporate world is making everyone to live inside a self-bubble. Guy and Gaby's relationship is a proof of that. Unlike Arjun, both of them are from quite similar culture but still they were far away from each other mentally. Guy, who always believed money can buy everything even Gaby, finds no word to express anything to her. Physically they were living in a same place but mentally they were far apart. Their situation was mentioned many times in the book including a scene where Guy is on a plane and thinks of Gaby so he starts to write a mail and is described as, "Switching his laptop on, he tried in a half-hearted way to compose a mail to Gabriella, but, confronted by the blank white screen, he could think of nothing to say" [5]. When Guy realized that Gaby will soon

leave him, he sent her an expensive gift with a note that read "Impressed" [5] on it: the fact that Guy cannot even write a loving note to his girlfriend is even pathetic than Arjun's situation with Chris. Ashley T. Shelden in "Cosmopolitan Love: The One and the World in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*" talks about Guy and Gaby's relationship and expressed, "love here leaves a bad taste in one's mouth" [11]. The plot of Guy's lack of social interaction shows that the world is becoming more and more mechanic leaving everyone for their own selves. All over the world people are connected by phones, laptops and social media but they are never connected from the heart.

Though this globalized world has created loneliness among people, it created a butterfly effect where everyone is somehow connected to everyone else. Globalization, here, ultimately brought something negative: an emotional detachment but a connection on the outer level. One person's life is so closely related to another's that everything is felt globally. The Virus which Arjun created for the sake of saving his job, eventually stroked everyone's life. Iwona Filipczak explained this as, "In Bauman's view, globalization, which is a phenomenon contributing greatly to the liquidity of the times, is one of the major sources of fears. The sociologist views globalization as "negative" [2]. Fear comes from the fact that the world is becoming so small that nothing can be kept on check. The spreading of the computer virus can be an example of that. The swiftness of the virus was described as, "Ten Minutes after the first mail went out from Patrice's computer, forty more people have unknowingly distributed it to their friends and contacts. Half an hour later 800 have done so" [5]. The virus even disrupted Guy's perfect life too. Guy's office became still because of the fact that no one could work on the computer because of the virus. Ironically enough, Guy was working for PEBA who hated immigrants. The virus manipulated with people's identity online which forced many innocent to be deported and many criminals to be free. Guy was one of the unfortunates. His situation was explained as, "The nature of the twenty-six days he spent in Tirane can only be guessed at from the testimony of Albanians who saw a man fitting his description foraging for scrapes behind restaurants in the city centre" [5]. Guy, a first world country's citizen almost became a bagger in another country. Guy and Arjun got connected through a virus. Two people who never saw each other and never knew each other. The intensifying and speeding up impact of worldwide interconnectedness is felt all over the globe. Iwona Filipczak explained this as, "The development of technology, communication and transport allows for close connections and frequent interactions between the most remote places on the planet" [2]. Leela's life was turned upside down because of this virus as well. As she was an Indian actress, people outside India did not know her. This virus gave her the extra fame which she dreaded. People started to think she created the virus to gain popularity. One of the reporter's questions portrays the scenario perfectly as we see, "And this virus tamasha is all a publicity stunt, am I correct? This Rocky Prasad drumming up interest in his

picture" [5]. People even started to take opportunity from the virus: money started to get missing, looting broke up, and all these show how interconnected the world has become and of course not in a good way.

The virus was an outbreak of Arjun's frustration. Through him, the writer conveyed the outcry of average people. Arjun never wanted to create a global disaster. He was a simple man with basic needs and dreams. The society forced him to change his ways. His breaking point was evident when he lost his job. It almost felt like he was losing his sanity, as the writer said, "Then it struck him. This was not his story. This was not his story because this was not how his story went. There had been a mistake" [5]. He could not process the fact that he was losing his job and to make the situation worse his co-workers were not helping as well. Arjun's boss, Darryl did not have the courtesy to fire him by himself instead he ignored him as much as he can. The situation was described as, "Make him go away" pleaded Darryl, his voice somewhat muffled. Jennifer Johanssen looked down at him, then back at Arjun, her face bearing the tense expression..." [5]. It seemed like Arjun was a stray animal and Darryl did not want Arjun anywhere near him. When Arjun helped the company by solving the problem, Darryl took all the credit himself which was described as, "Now behind the hot zone glass Darryl was explaining something to the other engineers. They were laughing, shaking his hand. They were treating Darryl like a hero" [5]. Arjun became a victim on the hand of corporate world where people wanted their own success. In "Beyond the 'new cross-cultural psychiatry': cultural biology, discursive psychology and the ironies of globalization" Laurence J Kirmayer talked about migration and explained, "Massive migrations of displaced persons, refugees and others seeking a viable future for their families have led to responses within receiving countries first of hospitality and then of anxiously constructing barricades against the other" [4]. When they needed cheap labour, they hired him but when they thought their company should cut some expense, they fired the outsider first. Sunitha C R explained in "Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* and the Globalized World" as, "Arjun tries hard to retain his job and believes himself as a wrong candidate to get fired... But when the company he works for resorts to cost cutting measures, his loyalty and effectiveness as a worker count little and profit becomes the only criteria the company strives for" [1]. Darryl could not get away from what he did as the virus took a new turn and ultimately his company was not in the business anymore. This global crisis could have been stopped and many lives could have been saved if people reacted in a different way.

Globalization was supposed to be a blessing but in today's world people are growing far apart from each other. All the problems of Arjun's life could have been solved: if he was taught about the difference between his culture and the other cultures, if he could have been more open with his family and if he could found help in America. Whenever a person moves to another country most of the time everyone thinks that he/she would be a huge success. They fail to understand the

struggles of the first world countries as Arjun's father was saying, "You are being promoted already?" Mr. Mehta's voice was thick with pride" [5]. Here Arjun was trying to tell his family the truth about his situation, he wanted to tell them that he was struggling but could not say anything as they were full of hopes and dreams. Laurence J Kirmayer put this as, "In opposition to the interest in cultural diversity as novelty, there is a longing for the familiar and for a community that provides a safe haven in an accelerated world of fragmented, displaced and devalued identities" [4]. Arjun was longing to reunite with his family, he was longing to make a place for his own but unfortunately that did not happen. The easiest solution for Arjun solution's situation would have been the equal treatment between all human beings. After moving to America Arjun not only became alienated but also he learnt about the mistreatments of immigrants. Hatice Övgü Tüzün conveyed Arjun's situation as, "His contractual position as a migrant worker from the developing world means that he is denied social as well as financial benefits accorded to his American peers" he also added, "Thus, Arjun wakes up to the fact that the workings of the global labour market...are actually designed to ensure maximum profit for the employer while allowing minimum rights to the employee" [12]. Arjun was ignored by his company, he was struggling and nobody cared. When he lost his job, his colleagues tried to forget his existence as Arjun observed, "The air in the office was stifling. His colleagues were pretending not to watch him, peering slyly round their cubicle walls" [5]. The global village was supposed to bring everyone close together instead it did something quite opposite.

4. Conclusion

From the very beginning if Arjun could get the proper support from his family and friends, maybe the story could have been different. His co-workers and his surrounding could have helped too. The distance of mind and culture contributed a lot to the story. Sunitha C R said, "The dark underside to the awareness of globalization is the fear of contamination and corruption, for as the prophylactic borders of the nation-state become increasingly porous; our capacity to resist the rapid spread of undesirable or hazardous elements is proportionately diminished" [1]. Everyone feared about their own boundary and about their own border. No one cared for the people in need. PH. Sanamacha Sharma explained the problem as, "critical decisions are made about the capability of a person's job thousands of miles away, and the person or persons responsible for making these decisions are likely to be more more-headed and less sentimental than if they were part of the community" [10]. Lack of feelings seems to be the main reason for global crisis like Leela virus. People are becoming more and more estranged from their own loved ones. The story could have been different if Arjun was treated as a human rather than a migrant.

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