

Bridging Worlds: Cultural Displacement, Identity, And Resilience In Anubha Mehta's *Peacock In The Snow*

Mr. Bhavik Patel^{1*}, Dr. Parthiv kumar Patel²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Parul University, Vadodara.

²Assistant Professor, CDC, Parul University, Vadodara.

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ABSTRACT

Peacock in the Snow (2021) by Anubha Mehta is a contemporary novel that explores the immigrant experience through the journey of an ambitious Indian woman who relocates to Canada. The novel delves into themes of identity, cultural displacement, and the struggle to balance personal aspirations with traditional expectations. Through the protagonist's conflicts in marriage, independence, and societal norms, the narrative highlights the challenges faced by immigrant women navigating a new world while remaining tethered to their heritage. Blending elements of realism with a touch of mysticism, Mehta's novel offers a compelling exploration of resilience, transformation, and the search for belonging in a multicultural landscape.

Keywords: immigrant, journey, identity, cultural displacement and transformation.

Introduction:

The phenomenon of diaspora has long been a subject of literary exploration, reflecting themes of identity, displacement, and cultural negotiation. Anubha Mehta's *Peacock in the Snow* (2021) provides a compelling narrative of an ambitious Indian woman's journey as she immigrates to Canada, confronting the tensions between personal aspirations, marital expectations, and cultural heritage. The novel portrays the complexities of the immigrant experience, highlighting the struggles of belonging, gendered expectations within the diaspora, and the emotional weight of nostalgia. Through the protagonist's transformation, Mehta examines the intersections of tradition and modernity, individualism and collectivism, and home and exile. This paper explores the novel's diasporic dimensions, focusing on cultural displacement, hybrid identity, patriarchal constraints, and the role of memory in shaping the immigrant experience. By analyzing these themes, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of South Asian diasporic literature and the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities in a globalized world.

Cultural Displacement and Identity Crisis:

Cultural displacement and identity crisis are central themes in *Peacock in the Snow*, as the protagonist navigates the complexities of immigration while attempting to preserve her Indian heritage. Her move to Canada represents more than a geographical shift—it is a psychological and emotional transformation that forces her to reconcile the conflicting demands of her native culture and her new environment. As an immigrant woman, she struggles to adapt to a Western society that values independence and self-expression, while still feeling the pull of her Indian roots, where familial duty and societal expectations dictate much of her identity. This tension is emblematic of the broader diasporic experience, where individuals must constantly negotiate between tradition and modernity. The protagonist finds herself caught between two cultural frameworks: on one hand, the deeply ingrained values of her upbringing, which emphasize family, marriage, and communal belonging; on the other, the pressures of Western society, which prioritize personal ambition and self-reliance. This duality creates an identity crisis, as she grapples with feelings of alienation in both spaces—never fully at home in Canada, yet gradually distanced from her Indian origins.

The novel highlights how cultural displacement not only challenges an individual's sense of self but also forces them to redefine their identity. The protagonist's struggle reflects the broader theme of hybrid identity, where immigrants must forge a new sense of self that blends elements from both cultures. However, this process is neither seamless nor easy. She experiences moments of nostalgia and longing for the familiarity of her

homeland, yet she also recognizes the limitations of the traditional roles she was expected to fulfill. This inner conflict—between loss and reinvention—forms the crux of her personal journey.

Through the protagonist's experiences, *Peacock in the Snow* illustrates the emotional toll of displacement and the difficulty of balancing cultural heritage with the need for self-definition. While she seeks to embrace aspects of Canadian life, she is also conscious of the ways in which her Indian identity shapes her worldview. The novel suggests that the process of adaptation does not necessarily mean complete assimilation, but rather the creation of a hybrid identity that allows for growth without erasing one's roots. In doing so, Mehta sheds light on the ongoing struggles of immigrants who must navigate multiple cultural landscapes while searching for a place to truly belong.

Gender and Patriarchy in the Diaspora:

Gender and patriarchy play a significant role in shaping the experiences of diasporic women in *Peacock in the Snow*, as the protagonist grapples with the expectations imposed by traditional South Asian gender roles while adapting to the social norms of Western society. The novel explores the complex intersections of culture, marriage, and personal freedom, illustrating how deeply entrenched patriarchal structures continue to influence the lives of immigrant women even in a seemingly progressive environment. The protagonist's struggle to assert her independence while fulfilling familial and societal expectations reveals the challenges of navigating gendered identities within the diaspora.

In South Asian culture, gender roles are often rigidly defined, with women expected to prioritize marriage, family honor, and domestic responsibilities over personal ambitions. The protagonist, having been raised within this framework, carries these cultural expectations with her to Canada. However, in her new environment, she encounters a society that encourages female autonomy, self-expression, and career aspirations—values that directly challenge the traditional norms she has internalized. This cultural dissonance places her in a difficult position, as she must negotiate between fulfilling her personal desires and adhering to the values of her upbringing. The tension between these two worlds creates a profound internal conflict, as she fears both losing her cultural identity and alienating herself from the new society she is trying to integrate into. Marriage becomes a central battleground for these competing ideals, as the protagonist faces the challenge of asserting her agency within a patriarchal structure. Her relationship is shaped by traditional gender expectations that emphasize obedience, sacrifice, and duty. While she yearns for independence, she also struggles with guilt and obligation, as South Asian culture often equates a woman's worth with her ability to maintain familial harmony. This struggle is intensified by the diasporic setting, where she is distanced from the support systems of her homeland yet still bound by the cultural norms that define her role within the family. The novel thus presents marriage not only as a personal relationship but as a site of cultural negotiation, where identity, power, and gender dynamics are continuously contested.

The protagonist's journey reflects the broader experiences of diasporic women who must navigate patriarchal structures in both their native and adopted cultures. While Western society offers new opportunities, it does not automatically erase the gendered limitations imposed by their cultural background. Instead, these women often find themselves in a liminal space, expected to embrace independence while still conforming to the roles assigned to them by their heritage. The novel challenges the notion that migration leads to immediate empowerment, showing instead that the process of self-liberation is fraught with emotional, social, and psychological struggles.

Through the protagonist's experiences, *Peacock in the Snow* highlights the resilience of diasporic women who carve out spaces for self-expression despite the constraints of tradition and patriarchy. Her journey illustrates that true agency is not simply about rejecting one's past but about reshaping it in a way that allows for personal growth without completely severing cultural ties. By portraying the complexities of gender roles in the diaspora, Anubha Mehta's novel sheds light on the silent battles faced by immigrant women, who must constantly negotiate their identities in order to survive and thrive in a world that often demands conflicting versions of who they should be.

Immigration and the Search for Belonging:

In *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta explores the emotional and psychological struggles of immigration, particularly through the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and adaptation in a foreign land. Immigration is not just a physical relocation but a deeply transformative experience that forces individuals to confront questions of identity, belonging, and emotional displacement. As the protagonist moves to Canada in pursuit of a new life, she finds herself caught between two worlds—one that she has left behind but still defines her, and another that she is expected to embrace but often feels alienated from. This tension highlights the profound impact of migration on an individual's sense of self, as well as the challenges of navigating a multicultural society that simultaneously offers opportunities and barriers to acceptance.

The emotional and psychological effects of immigration are evident in the protagonist's struggle to adapt to her new environment. While Canada promises a fresh start, it also presents an unfamiliar social landscape where she must redefine her identity. Feelings of isolation, nostalgia, and cultural displacement weigh heavily on her, making the process of settlement far more complex than simply adjusting to a new way of life. She often longs for the familiarity of her homeland, where traditions, language, and social structures provided a sense of security. However, she also recognizes that returning to her past is not an option, as she has already begun to

change in ways that make full reintegration difficult. This emotional duality is a common experience among immigrants, who frequently feel torn between their roots and their new reality.

One of the major challenges faced by the protagonist is gaining acceptance in a multicultural society that, while outwardly inclusive, still maintains subtle barriers to full integration. As an immigrant woman, she experiences both visible and invisible forms of discrimination, which reinforce feelings of being an outsider. The struggle to be seen and heard in a society where she is constantly marked as "the other" creates a deep sense of loneliness and insecurity. Despite Canada's reputation for multiculturalism, the novel highlights the complexities of belonging, where diversity is celebrated but true assimilation remains elusive. The protagonist must navigate these challenges by finding ways to assert her identity without completely erasing her cultural heritage.

At the heart of the novel is the question of what "home" truly means. For the protagonist, home is no longer a singular, fixed location but a fluid and evolving concept. Initially, she associates home with her birthplace, where her traditions, memories, and early experiences are rooted. However, as she builds a new life in Canada, she begins to question whether home is defined by geography or by emotional connection. The search for belonging becomes a journey of reconciling the past with the present, as she strives to create a space for herself in her new country without feeling like she has abandoned her origins. This exploration of home and identity is a central theme in diasporic literature, reflecting the broader struggles of immigrants who must constantly redefine their sense of self in unfamiliar surroundings.

Through the protagonist's experiences, *Peacock in the Snow* sheds light on the immigrant's search for belonging, illustrating the emotional toll of displacement and the challenges of cultural integration. The novel emphasizes that belonging is not simply about adopting a new nationality but about finding a balance between one's heritage and the realities of a new world. In doing so, Mehta presents a nuanced portrayal of immigration, showing that the process of settlement is not linear but an ongoing negotiation of identity, memory, and self-acceptance.

Hybrid Cultural Identity and Multiculturalism:

In *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta explores the complexities of hybrid cultural identity, highlighting how immigrants must navigate between their native traditions and the values of their adopted homeland. The protagonist's journey reflects the broader experience of the South Asian diaspora, where individuals must reconcile two often contrasting cultural frameworks. As she moves to Canada, she finds herself caught between the traditions of her Indian upbringing and the new social expectations of a Western society. This fusion of cultures shapes her identity, leading to a constant negotiation between preserving her heritage and adapting to her new environment.

The protagonist's hybrid identity is formed through her daily experiences as she tries to balance Indian cultural values—such as familial duty, respect for elders, and community-oriented living—with the Canadian emphasis on individualism and self-reliance. While she carries the customs and beliefs of her homeland, she also finds herself drawn to the freedoms and opportunities that Canadian society offers. However, this blending of cultures is not without conflict. She must decide which aspects of her Indian heritage to retain and which to modify in order to integrate into her new world. This struggle is particularly evident in her personal relationships, as she navigates the expectations placed on her as a South Asian woman while also asserting her independence in a Western setting.

One of the most challenging aspects of this cultural fusion is raising a family in a foreign land while trying to preserve one's traditions. The protagonist, like many first-generation immigrants, faces the difficulty of passing down her cultural heritage to the next generation while ensuring that her children can thrive in Canadian society. The generational gap between immigrant parents and their children is a common theme in diasporic literature, as younger generations often adopt the values of their host country more readily than their parents. The protagonist must grapple with the fear of losing her cultural roots while also recognizing that strict adherence to tradition may create a divide between her and her children. This tension underscores the challenges of maintaining a cultural identity in a multicultural society where different belief systems coexist but do not always align.

Mehta also critically examines Canada's reputation as a multicultural society, exploring both its inclusivity and its limitations. On the surface, Canada presents itself as a nation that celebrates diversity, allowing immigrants to retain their cultural identities while becoming part of the larger society. However, the novel also highlights the subtle forms of alienation that immigrants face. Despite the country's policies of inclusion, the protagonist encounters societal barriers that make full acceptance difficult. The expectation that immigrants assimilate to dominant cultural norms, the struggle to find a sense of belonging, and the experience of being viewed as an outsider all contribute to her feeling of cultural displacement. This duality—where Canada is both welcoming and exclusionary—reflects the lived reality of many immigrants who must work to carve out spaces where they can exist authentically.

Peacock in the Snow presents hybrid identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state. The protagonist's journey demonstrates that identity is fluid, shaped by personal experiences, external pressures, and the continuous negotiation between past and present. Rather than choosing between two cultures, she learns to merge aspects of both, creating a space where she can honor her heritage while embracing her new life. Through

this portrayal, Mehta offers a nuanced perspective on multiculturalism, showing that true belonging is not about assimilation but about the ability to exist as one's full self in a diverse society.

Exile, Nostalgia, and Memory:

In *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta explores the profound emotional and psychological effects of exile, nostalgia, and memory on the immigrant experience. The protagonist's journey is marked by a deep longing for her homeland, as she navigates the challenges of displacement while attempting to establish a sense of belonging in Canada. Her memories of India remain vivid and influential, shaping her identity and perceptions of her new environment. Through the protagonist's reflections, the novel highlights how nostalgia functions as both a source of comfort and a barrier to full integration, complicating the process of adaptation in the diaspora. The protagonist's memories of India serve as an emotional anchor, connecting her to the culture, traditions, and relationships she left behind. Her longing for her homeland is not simply about missing a physical place but about the deep-seated sense of familiarity, belonging, and identity that was once unquestioned. The smells, sounds, and rituals of her past life contrast sharply with the unfamiliarity of her present reality in Canada. This longing is heightened by moments of cultural dissonance, where the protagonist finds herself struggling to fit into a society that feels foreign despite her efforts to assimilate. Her memories of India provide her with a sense of continuity and stability, yet they also make her acutely aware of what she has lost in the process of migration. Nostalgia plays a crucial role in shaping the protagonist's diasporic identity, influencing the way she perceives herself and her place in the world. In many ways, nostalgia acts as both a refuge and a source of pain—it allows her to maintain a connection to her roots, but it also prevents her from fully embracing her new life. The novel suggests that for many immigrants, nostalgia is not merely a sentimental yearning for the past but a psychological mechanism that helps them cope with the uncertainties of their present reality. However, this longing can also create an emotional divide, making it difficult for the protagonist to feel completely at home in Canada. She exists in a liminal space, neither fully belonging to her homeland nor entirely fitting into her new country.

The contrast between the past (India) and the present (Canada) is a recurring theme in the protagonist's journey, highlighting the complexities of cultural transition. In India, she was deeply connected to her community, with well-defined social roles and a shared cultural understanding. In Canada, she faces an individualistic society where relationships are more fragmented, and traditional values are not always recognized. This shift forces her to reevaluate her own identity, as she attempts to find a balance between the values she was raised with and the expectations of her new environment. The stark differences between these two worlds create an ongoing internal struggle, as she oscillates between acceptance and resistance to the changes in her life.

Peacock in the Snow portrays exile, nostalgia, and memory as central to the immigrant experience. The protagonist's journey illustrates that while physical migration is a one-time event, the emotional and psychological effects of displacement are long-lasting. Nostalgia, rather than being a passive reflection on the past, actively shapes her present reality, influencing the way she interprets and engages with the world around her. Through this exploration, Mehta captures the enduring impact of migration, showing that for many immigrants, the concept of "home" is never fully fixed but remains an evolving and deeply personal construct.

Mysticism and Cultural Heritage in the Diaspora:

In *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta weaves elements of mysticism and cultural heritage into the protagonist's journey, using them as tools to navigate the challenges of displacement and identity reconstruction. Mysticism in the novel serves as a bridge between past and present, allowing the protagonist to maintain a deep connection to her Indian roots even as she struggles to assimilate into her new life in Canada. Through the use of magical realism and spiritual or mythological motifs, the novel illustrates how cultural heritage provides resilience, helping the protagonist find strength and meaning amid the alienation and uncertainty of the immigrant experience.

Magical realism, often associated with postcolonial and diasporic literature, allows the novel to blend reality with the metaphysical, emphasizing the ways in which culture, memory, and spirituality shape an individual's perception of the world. For the protagonist, mysticism is not merely an escape from reality but a means of understanding her own transformation. Her Indian upbringing, steeped in mythology, folklore, and spiritual traditions, continues to shape her consciousness even in a Western setting. This manifests in moments where the boundaries between the physical and the supernatural blur, suggesting that the past, culture, and ancestral wisdom remain active forces in her life. The novel uses these mystical elements to reinforce the idea that cultural identity is not something that can be entirely abandoned; rather, it persists in ways both visible and invisible, influencing the protagonist's decisions and self-perception.

Spirituality and mythology also play a key role in shaping the protagonist's diasporic experience, offering her guidance and a sense of purpose. As she struggles with the challenges of immigration—cultural alienation, shifting gender roles, and personal reinvention—she often turns to the spiritual teachings and myths from her childhood. These stories and beliefs serve as an anchor, helping her make sense of the changes she is undergoing. Whether through symbolic dreams, visions, or encounters with mystical elements, the novel suggests that the protagonist's spiritual inheritance remains alive within her, even as she moves further away from the physical spaces of her homeland. By incorporating these mythological and mystical influences,

Peacock in the Snow highlights the enduring power of cultural heritage, showing that spirituality can provide comfort and direction, particularly in moments of displacement and crisis.

Cultural heritage, as depicted in the novel, is not just about rituals or traditions but also about the resilience it fosters in the face of upheaval. The protagonist, like many immigrants, experiences moments of doubt and detachment, yet it is her deep-rooted connection to her heritage that enables her to endure these hardships. The novel suggests that maintaining one's cultural identity—whether through stories, spiritual practices, or a belief in forces beyond the material world—can serve as a form of resistance against the erasure that often accompanies migration. In this way, mysticism in *Peacock in the Snow* becomes a metaphor for the endurance of identity, illustrating that even as the protagonist adapts to a new society, the cultural wisdom of her ancestors continues to shape her path forward.

Mehta uses mysticism to emphasize the continuity between past and present, showing that the immigrant experience is not solely about loss but also about transformation. While migration often demands change, it does not require complete severance from one's origins. By integrating elements of magical realism and spirituality, *Peacock in the Snow* offers a nuanced portrayal of how cultural heritage remains a source of strength, allowing the protagonist to navigate her diasporic identity without losing the essence of who she is.

Challenges of Intercultural Relationships:

In *Peacock in the Snow*, Anubha Mehta explores the complexities of intercultural relationships within the South Asian diaspora, highlighting how differing cultural expectations, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and generational gaps create tensions in both marital and familial dynamics. The protagonist's journey reflects the broader struggle faced by many immigrants who must balance traditional values with the realities of life in a Western society. The novel underscores how these tensions can lead to emotional turmoil, forcing individuals to negotiate between familial duty and personal autonomy while attempting to maintain meaningful relationships across cultural divides.

One of the central challenges the protagonist faces is the strain that differing cultural expectations place on her marriage and family life. South Asian traditions often emphasize collectivism, where familial relationships are deeply intertwined with social expectations and responsibilities. Marriage, in particular, is not just a personal commitment but a union that carries cultural, religious, and generational significance. In contrast, Western societies tend to prioritize individualism, personal choice, and emotional fulfillment over collective duty. As the protagonist settles into her new life in Canada, she finds herself caught between these two worlds—expected to uphold the traditional gender roles and family obligations of her South Asian heritage while also embracing the independence and self-determination encouraged by her new environment. These conflicting expectations create tensions in her marriage, as she and her spouse struggle to reconcile their different understandings of partnership, love, and familial obligations.

Beyond marriage, *Peacock in the Snow* also explores the generational gaps that emerge within diasporic families as different generations adapt to their host culture at different paces. First-generation immigrants, like the protagonist, often carry the values and customs of their homeland, while their children—raised in Canada—are more likely to embrace the norms of their new society. This generational divide can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication, and even conflicts over identity, career choices, and relationships. For the protagonist, the challenge lies in bridging this gap—preserving cultural traditions while allowing for the inevitable changes that come with migration. The novel highlights how these generational tensions can create feelings of alienation, as individuals feel torn between upholding familial expectations and asserting their own identities.

A key underlying factor in these intercultural tensions is the impact of Western individualism on traditional South Asian familial structures. In many South Asian cultures, decisions about marriage, family roles, and career paths are often made collectively, with the extended family playing a central role in shaping an individual's life choices. However, in Canada, the emphasis on self-reliance and independence challenges these norms, forcing the protagonist to reevaluate her own values and priorities. She struggles with the guilt of breaking away from cultural traditions while also yearning for the freedom to define her own path. This internal conflict is exacerbated by the expectations placed upon her as a South Asian woman, where duty to family is often prioritized over personal happiness. The novel reveals how this clash between collectivism and individualism can create deep emotional and psychological conflicts for immigrants, making it difficult to fully integrate into their new society without feeling as though they have abandoned their cultural roots.

Peacock in the Snow presents intercultural relationships as a site of both conflict and transformation. While cultural differences can create obstacles, they also offer opportunities for growth, adaptation, and deeper understanding. The protagonist's journey illustrates that navigating these challenges requires resilience, open-mindedness, and the ability to embrace change without completely severing ties to one's heritage. Through its exploration of marital struggles, generational gaps, and cultural shifts, the novel provides a nuanced portrayal of the immigrant experience, demonstrating that true belonging and harmony come from finding a balance between tradition and modernity, duty and independence, and personal fulfillment and cultural continuity.

Conclusion:

Anubha Mehta's *Peacock in the Snow* offers a profound exploration of the diasporic experience, illustrating the complexities of cultural displacement, identity negotiation, and the emotional struggles of immigration. Through the protagonist's journey, the novel highlights the tension between traditional South Asian values and Western ideals, particularly in the realms of gender roles, family expectations, and personal autonomy. The challenges of intercultural relationships, the generational divide within the diaspora, and the psychological burden of nostalgia further emphasize the difficulties of belonging in a multicultural society. However, the novel also presents cultural heritage as a source of strength, demonstrating how mysticism, spirituality, and ancestral wisdom can provide resilience in times of displacement.

At its core, *Peacock in the Snow* underscores the fluid and evolving nature of identity in the diaspora. The protagonist's struggle to integrate into Canadian society while preserving her Indian heritage reflects the broader experience of immigrants who must balance adaptation with cultural continuity. The novel challenges the idea that assimilation is the only path to belonging, instead advocating for a hybrid identity that embraces both past and present. Mehta's portrayal of the immigrant experience suggests that true belonging is not about erasing one's origins but about creating a space where multiple identities can coexist. Through its exploration of exile, nostalgia, patriarchy, and multiculturalism, the novel contributes to the discourse on South Asian diasporic literature, offering a nuanced perspective on the emotional and social struggles of immigration. *Peacock in the Snow* illustrates that while displacement brings challenges, it also fosters transformation, resilience, and the opportunity to redefine oneself in a constantly shifting cultural landscape.

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