

Frontiers Dividing and Connecting Places: A Study of Poetry by Arundhathi Subramaniam, Anjum Hasan, C.P. Surendran, and Tabish Khair¹

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Abstract

Places are formed and distinctly identified as separate from each other because of the boundaries drawn between them. Places are formed for us when we attribute certain meanings to them, positive or negative. What exists in between two such places is seen as undifferentiated space. Michel Certeau, a twentieth century Marxist theorist in France, argues that frontiers simultaneously connect and link places while dividing them from each other.¹In this paper, I attempt to analyse the ways in which frontiers do this in the poetry of four contemporary Indian poets writing in English: Arundhathi Subramaniam, Anjum Hasan, C.P. Surendran, and Tabish Khair. I begin by examining dividers and connectors between places at the micro level, such as doors, windows, curtains, and side gates, and later discuss how larger spaces such as cities and countries are also simultaneously linked and divided by these frontiers. Places are viewed and perceived very differently depending which side of the boundary one is on. The discussion of the poetry shows that spaces are linked to each other temporally as well as spatially, and thus cannot be seen in isolation. Cultures travel from one place to another, so people are not necessarily the inheritors of only one legacy. Frontiers divide as well as connect. Our view of a place is determined by which side of the frontier we are on, depending on whether we are citizens, migrants or tourists. The discussion above has also shown that places are regarded very differently by people who do not have an association with them, and thus see them as amorphous, undifferentiated space.

Keywords: places, spaces, frontiers, boundary, travel, cultures

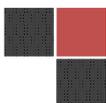
¹The paper has earlier been presented in JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) in March 2013, and also in SAU (South Asian University) in April 2019. Details of these conferences are given in my CV.

Places are formed and distinctly identified as separate from each other because of the boundaries drawn between them. Thus it is these frontiers and boundaries that create the essences of what places are, and separate them from other places. We view these boundaries very differently, depending on which side of the boundary we are on. Places are formed for us when we attribute certain meanings to them, positive or negative. Places are formed when we strongly perceive them with all our senses, and attach memories, experiences and emotions with them. What exists in between two such places is seen as undifferentiated, amorphous and abstract space. This is just the space we traverse to reach some other place. It is the means to the end, but the journey is rarely ever the end in itself. We always treat the destination as the end. Michel Certeau, a twentieth century Marxist theorist in France, argues that frontiers simultaneously connect and link places while dividing them from each other: “This is a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them. Of two bodies in contact, which one possessed the frontier that distinguishes them? Neither. Does that amount to saying: no one?”

In this paper, I attempt to analyze the ways in which frontiers do this in the poetry of four contemporary Indian poets writing in English: Arundhathi Subramaniam, Anjum Hasan, C.P. Surendran, and Tabish Khair. In Part I, I begin by examining dividers and connectors between places at the micro level, such as doors, windows, curtains, and side gates which are responsible for both inclusion and exclusion. Sometimes we long to escape from a place we are stuck in, and sometimes we long to enter a place from which we are debarred. Then, in part II, I examine what happens to us when we move across frontiers from one place to another. In this regard, I look at the question of travel and discuss the difference between tourists and travellers. I explore the question of this space we pass through when we travel from one place to another and whether our sensory experiences and memories and associations can ever be formed with this space through which we traverse the way our lived experiences can be formed with places that we have intimately known. Finally, in part III, I attempt to analyze the question of the lived experience of immigration and whether those who inherit two cultures belong to both, or to neither.

In order to do, I must first briefly discuss Lefebvre concept of lived and perceived places as opposed to abstract space. Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist theorist writing in twentieth century France, argues in *The Production of Space* that space was strictly regarded as an empty geometrical area till the first half of the century. Lefebvre terms this normative concept of space as “conceived”, which he challenges by his own dialectical view of spaces as “lived” and “perceived”. The “actual city”, he argues, is perhaps a place that can never be reached as it exists somewhere between conceived, perceived, and lived spaces.

Spaces are “conceived” when abstract representations view them in purely quantifiable terms, as physical spaces that can be mapped, calculated, controlled, and exploited. Cartographical maps, gazetteers, and statistical data are some of the ways in which abstract space is represented. These “representations of space” are used mainly by scientists, planners, urbanists, social engineers, and even architects. Michel de Certeau, another Marxist theorist in France who is a contemporary of Lefebvre, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* argues that structures of power desire to reduce space to a set of statistics that is knowable and governable to maintain their hegemony. Certeau refers to Michel



Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* where he analyses forms of surveillance and disciplining through institutions such as education, media and the law. As against this concept of abstract and surveilled space, Lefebvre endorses a dialectical view of spaces as lived and perceived.

Lived spaces, according to Lefebvre, are the spaces within our heads consisting of images and associations arising from our interactions with the spatial environment around us. These private, subjective worlds are created by individuals as they invest spaces with their own meanings, memories and desires, thereby appropriating them. They can also be termed as "spaces of representations" because works of art are created by the images and associations within our minds. Certeau argues that the meaning of a place is different for each one of us because we carry different memories and "stories" inside our heads. Memories are also selective in terms of what they retain and filter from perceived reality. He makes a distinction between "rumours" which are authorized narratives which aim at leveling or totalizing space, and "stories" which are personal, individual ways of associating with a place or an event. Poetry too can challenge the normative patterns of viewing spaces as it looks at minute and subjective experiences of everyday life.

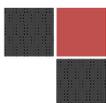
Perceived space, according to Lefebvre, is the spatial environment, physical as well as social, that surrounds us. Also known as "social spaces", they consist of buildings and roads around us, as well as interactions and tensions existing between people. According to Lefebvre, perceived spaces within cities are socially produced as a result of the class divide. Here, he appears to follow Marx's argument that "relations of production" or social spaces are governed by the "forces of production"; relations between people are governed by the economic class they belong to and their role in the production process. "Spatial practices", according to Lefebvre and Certeau, are ordinary daily life activities such as walking, cooking, using the local train and so on which help in appropriating the perceived spaces around us. (33-40, 1991) These are miniscule, microbial practices such as walking, cooking, dwelling, and telling stories that can rupture the abstractions that structures of power seek to uphold.

I

In this section, I discuss with the help of a few poems, how frontiers and boundaries both divide and connect places, and how we view these frontiers either as dividers or as connectors, depending on our personal, subjective and lived experiences of particular places with which we have certain feelings and associations attached. Arundhati Subramaniam in 'At the Doors of Closed Rooms' shows us how places are formed through selective inclusion and exclusion. She depicts bonhomie between men in a closed room, their wives waiting outside. She writes that she longs to write a poem in embalmed metaphors, without bringing in banalities such as-

women battered
by the men they love
But it is difficult.

She says that she knows the whispered secrets that go on between men within these rooms, but that she can never believe that true love was meant to be like this. The poem suggests that the ideal of love has been destroyed by men who seem to consider their wives as only fit for certain roles, and do not allow them to be privy to male conversation.



I want to tell you that I do know
 Of the guerrilla secrets of intimacy,
 The lunacies that claw
 At the doors of closed rooms

...

Nor poet, I offer you only the thin solace
 Of my rage and this unwavering certainty-
 No, I cannot believe love was ever meant to be like this.

Closed doors are definitely dividers. They are not connectors. In this case, the poem shows us spaces of male camaraderie from which women are excluded. Frontiers include some people and exclude others.

These politics of inclusion and exclusion are again seen in 'Side Gate' where the side gate of the school is seen as a route of escape to the outside world. The side-gate is a way by which one can escape the confinement of school during recess by dashing past the ENT hospital to a space of freedom where dreams and possibilities of growing and evolving seem to be endless.

towards a sea as Arabian as the spirit towards a sea where it is possible to become what one has always been -

snorting steed with cumulous mane
 pounding into the tides,
 foaming galaxies of unbottled fiction,
 deferred coastlines,
 endless nights.

The school here seems to be seen as a place of restrictions, and the world outside is seen as a space where one can realize all one's repressed desires and bottled-up dreams, a space where one need not subscribe to definite codes and definitions of being. Here the side gate is shown to be connecting the space of the school with the outside, wider world. We do not see a sense or an element of division here.

Anjum Hasan's 'Yellow Curtains' shows how the curtains neatly divide the world into two:

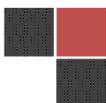
What they do best is divide our constricted world
 There: war, traffic fumes, lanes full of hungry bitches
 Here: bedrooms, soup boiling, 3am dreams

The home is seen here as a place of warmth, security and comfort whereas the world outside is a threatening space of uncertainty where violence, poverty, pollution and other evils exist:

The curtains are an act of selfishness
 They turn the house neat, guiltless, middle class

The curtains are also a symbol of comfort and happiness as a child, yellow was my metaphor for happiness and here we are now with our fantastically yellow curtains and I have the image and I have that to which it corresponds.

For years, she has associated the bright yellow colour of the curtains with cheerfulness, home and comfort, which only adds up to her feeling of security. Beyond



this haven, there is an unknown world where dire things may happen. The view of the outside world beyond the frontiers is very differently expressed in Subramaniam's and Hasan's poems discussed above. Subramaniam longs to escape the space of the school and so the outside, vast space of "freedom" has positive connotations for her, whereas Hasan is happy and content with the safe and comforting space of the home, and has no desire to reach out beyond the boundary of the yellow curtains. How we view the frontiers then, depends on our lived experiences of the spaces themselves.

Having briefly discussed spatial boundaries, we must also recognize that these boundaries can be temporal as well. It could be the frontier between life and death, or it could be a frontier which either encloses us in, or separates us from, memories and experiences of a former time.

Surendran's 'Doors' talks about the door between life and death which can be crossed only once. This is the partitioning of temporal spaces, in this case one from which there is no return. We may live our lives in myriad ways, but we will always emerge "into the dread dark blue space".

Living all your days
 In a hundred different ways
 You emerge
 Into the dread dark blue space
 As the last door falls in place
 ...
 To face the place
 You can't open or shut. (*Posthumous Poems* 51)

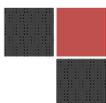
Similarly, Surendran's 'Curtains' is about the past being screened off from the present. The curtains separate the hall from the frozen lake surroundings, the sunset, and the potted roses on the window sill. Inside the hall, ancient spirits haunt the place in the form of old, framed, photographs, and his father lies still on the cot, in his last years of life, suffering from Alzheimer's disease, looking at the photograph of his smiling daughter. In some sense, the curtains separate not only the hall from the surroundings outside, but also the past, which is symbolized by the hall, from the present of the lake, the sunset and the roses.

II

In this section, I discuss what happens when we travel across these frontiers to go to other places, in what ways we see these destinations that we travel to, and in what ways we see the amorphous space that we travel through while going to these destinations.

Arundhathi Subramaniam shows us the camaraderie in the women's compartment of a local train in '5.46 Andheri Local':

In the women's compartment
 Of a Bombay local
 We search
 For no personal epiphanies.
 Like metal licked by relentless acetylene
 We are welded-
 Dreams, destinies,



Flesh and organza,
 Odours and ovaries.
 A thousand-limbed
 million tongued, multi spoused
 kali on wheels. (*Where I Live: New & Selected Poems* 15)

Here, the local train is not just some abstract, amorphous space that she is passing through. She feels intimately connected to all the other women, and there seems to be an energy and strength of bonding in women's camaraderie with each other. This is a space of women's camaraderie, just as the space of men's camaraderie behind closed doors shown in the first poem discussed in this paper, also by Subramaniam.

Tabish Khair in 'Leaving Gaya Station shows us how abstract, amorphous and undifferentiated space can sometimes, turn into a living, breathing and experiential place for us. The poem shows the last one hour at the station before the departure of the train which is delayed by an hour, when time seems to hang heavy on our hands and gives us the space to reflect.

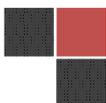
Speak. This is no time for silence:
 vacant corners of the mind breed ghosts
 Nothing is as haunting as emptiness.
 Smile. Turn to this man reading a magazine,
 To the old couple abandoned by someone else,
 And ask them a question with an answer: names,
 News... (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 37)

The emptiness leads one to the interiors of one's mind, to escape which one tries to show a curiosity and an interest in one's surroundings. The Gaya station here again seems to become a place for the travelers instead of a mere amorphous space because of their enforced waiting period which gives them the time and space to interact with each other as well as to absorb the place.

In the two poems discussed above, we saw how abstract and amorphous spaces on our journeys, enroute to our destination, can also become lived and experiential places for us. Now I will discuss a few poems which show the counterview: which is that we focus on our destinations and pass places en route to our destinations as random spaces which we do not fully live and experience.

In Surendran's 'To and Fro', the Bombay local is seen as "a concentration camp of a people on the go", a description vastly different from Subramaniam's. Like Surendran, Certeau views the train as a grid where people can be "pigeonholed", and so can be regulated and controlled. Certeau also sees the train as "a bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment, that makes possible the production of an order, a closed and autonomous insularity- that is what can traverse space and make itself independent of local roots." Thus for Certeau, it seems that a train is linked more with abstract space than with experiential lived spaces. For Certeau, a train has no local roots, it cannot be a lived and experienced place in itself, it is necessarily only a means (of transport) to the end. This is in absolute contrast of what we see in Arundhathi Subramaniam's poem about the local train.

The train does not take one to new places, it takes one to and fro, back and forth down the same places,



And stuck
 like a bone
 in the ring of your throat,
 Names
 Of destinations
 Which will not come or go. (*Posthumous Poems* 20)

There is a sense of routine here, a kind of monotony. The poet is not actively and sensorily absorbing or engaging with the place anymore. Perhaps these destinations are points in his mind, or memory, that he can never reach. Perhaps he wants these destinations to take him away from himself.

In 'Travel', he needs to "go far from his feet." And no means of travel can lead one away from oneself. In these poems, travel does not seem to lead us to movement and novelty because we focus on destinations and we disregard and ignore the spaces that lie between our places of departure and arrival. This is again seen in Tabish Khair's 'Roads' where he ironically shows us a typical Indian crowd with lepers crawling and rickshaw wheels, all disorder and anarchy:

This rush to leave, this inability to go anywhere
 (for the road, you may have marked, never drains empty)
 This road that comes from somewhere and (probably) goes somewhere
 Places that you know slightly, or not at all
 This road that is cluttered with motion, restless as life
 If you look closely at this road (lying drunk on the ground maybe)
 If you look closely enough at it, this road won't appear to move. (*My World* 31)

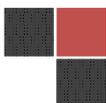
The poem seems to be a parody of the customary scene on Indian roads clogged with life and people. The image is one of stasis than one of movement and vitality. The road itself does not move, nor does it seem to enable people to go anywhere. There is a sense of being stuck and stagnant. Roads again, are not seen here as places in themselves. They are routes which are supposed to lead us to other places, and here they do not seem to be serving their proper function. Perhaps, because the roads are dysfunctional, people are forced to take cognizance of them as places in themselves, teeming with life.

Anjum Hasan's 'Mawlai' shows us a place that the poet has crossed regularly several times and yet, it is not "real" for her. It however becomes real only when she realizes that this pattern of travel would stop, and that she would not be passing this way ever again.

For seventeen years we passed through Mawlai in a bus
 saw waxy red flowers in the pomegranate trees and a man
 pegging brilliant white napkins on a clothesline against the wind.
 We didn't live there and those who lived there didn't care about
 the buses passing through at all times of the day. (*Street on the Hill* 41)

They never experienced Mawlai as a place because they always treated it as just some town which they had to cross on their journey to another place. It never really existed for them as an inhabited place, even though they crossed the same houses with the washing hung out in front of them year after year. She writes that they would feel the difference only if they ever returned to Mawlai:

We'll want to urgently tell someone, if we ever happen to return



that we knew this place, passed through in a bus for seventeen years
 but having said that we won't know what else to say about Mawlai
 because we never really got off there or bought things from its shop
 or stepped into someone's boiled- vegetables-smelling house
 to watch the street through netted curtains. We'll keep quiet then
 and try to ignore that sense which is not pain but has pain's cloudiness
 and its regret and its way of going and returning. (*Street on the Hill* 41)

She writes that if they ever return to this place, they will feel a pang of regret and wish that they had known this place fully when they used to cross through it, instead of treating it as in-between space. This is also seen in Surendran's 'Air-Conditioned Escapade' which shows that we hardly experience places through which we travel, which are not real places for us at all, unlike the Andheri local which is a real place for Subramaniam. In Surendran's poem, the countryside they pass through, the various shades of the sun and the fields, are not surroundings they really experience as they travel within the sterilized, air-conditioned car:

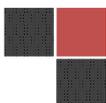
Truant hands
 Wipe the face clean
 With cologne cold tissue.
 They sit back,
 watch the highway flee
 From the scene of grime. (*Posthumous Poems* 25)

In several poems, Hasan takes us to visit tourist spots and shows us the difference between the ways in which a place is viewed by sightseers and inhabitants. The people in Hasan's poems seem to see places superficially; they do not seem to become "speculative thinkers", unlike what Certeau argues. Certeau argues that frontiers such as a train or a bus window give us the capacity to see things from a distance which we may ordinarily never notice. This space which is neither here nor there gives us the ability to view differently.¹¹ He claims that these barriers of glass and iron create "speculative thinkers or gnostics" out of us as this cutting-off from the outside is necessary for the birth of our own "strange fables and private stories. This is also what I term as the difference between tourists and travellers. Tourists look at a place superficially, while travellers experience it and live it with awareness, with their minds and hearts open to new cultures and experiences.

In the poems that I now discuss, Anjum Hasan seems to be breaking through stereotypical ways of viewing a city, while simultaneously showing the difference in perception between visitors and residents, tourists and travellers. In 'Holiday', Hasan's friends are shown to come in luxury buses and stay in five star hotels, visit touristy spots, and roll away again the next day in the empty buses singing love songs. These tourists have no idea of the people of the town:

shirtless men
 holding baby boys, families the size
 of wedding parties, married girls so blank eyed
 they might have left themselves in some other
 hot and ochre town where they were born. (*Street on the Hill* 52)

She writes that after this her friends will disappear once more into the complex, untidy city "full of lies and defeat", after their short visit to the hill town where they



“presume to touch the heart of things”. In most of Hasan’s poems, there seems to be a deep sense of the place itself which seems to be replaced here by a more superficial understanding by the tourists, who do not even try to experience it, they are content to see it as a break of laughter and gaiety from their daily routine.

Similarly, in ‘Beach Town: Off Season’, she dislodges stereotypical assumptions associated with a beach town by showing it during “off season” time. Henri Lefebvre argues that through tourism, we have moved from “spaces of consumption” to the “consumption of space”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ itself. Hasan seems to show this by depicting the beach town as a place where even the sea “is made accomplice to this miserable market economy”, and not vice versa. The sea is pressed into service for the furtherance of tourism: its pictures used as postcards, and its shells as cosmetic. “No-one’s pretending this is real anymore.” She ends, however, with a yearning for the “real” sea:

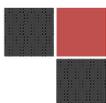
But I want the real sea, the one I hear briefly
when we lie together, our sweat combined
the inside of my wrist resting on the heel
of your hand, the one blue calm flooding perfect
sea that I am straining for beyond motorbikes
the faded curtains, the temple’s loudspeaker
beyond the exteriors of things that want
but ought not to hold us. (*Street on the Hill* 57)

Here, she seems to be trying to go beyond the cheap market economy, the sordid materiality which this place has been reduced to, and to feel the soul and spirit of the sea, and the significance that it has for her. Thus, she questions the essential character of the place and strives to find something deeper that holds greater meaning for her.

III

I now examine the process of migration, and the ways in which an immigrant perceives a place differently from citizens residing there. Khair makes a distinction between the official process of immigration that involves paperwork and bureaucracy, and the actual, lived experience of immigrating, in ‘Immigration’ and ‘Immigrant.’ ‘Immigration’ shows us the paperwork that stamps and brands individuals, the “proof of your being” embedded in systems of surveillance. This poem is a part of a series in which Khair reworks Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* where Shakuntala needs to furnish the ring he gave her as a “proof of (her) being”. (*Man of Glass* 16) ‘Immigrant’ however depicts the lived experience of an immigrant. This poem is a reworking of Grimms’ fairy tale ‘The Little Mermaid’, thus weaving in Ariel’s migration from the world of mermaids to one of humans, with a larger theme:

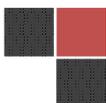
It hurts to walk on new legs:
The curse of consonants, the wobble of vowels.
And you for whom I gave up a kingdom
Can never love that thing I was.
When you look into my past
You see
Only
Weeds and scales.
Once I had a voice.
Now I have legs.



Sometimes I wonder
was it fair trade? (*Man of Glass* 66)

One is an immigrant only because one leaves a past behind, and the poem suggests that the past is never really accepted or valued in the new culture. The emphasis is on assimilating the otherness of the immigrant within the dominant culture. In one's native country, one has the right to speak out, to vote and so on. The poem seems to say that just as Ariel gave up her beautiful voice and learnt the use of legs when she came to live with humans, an immigrant too gives up the power of speech in order to gain the power of movement and travel. Khair writes that he sometimes wonders if it was a fair trade to give up the freedom of speech and opinion in order to immigrate. In 'Refugee', he reworks the 'Princess and the Pea' fairytale to again shed light upon identities that need to be proven. Referring to the test of the princess in the fairy tale who had to sleep on mattresses underneath which a pea was kept, he shows us that the identity of a refugee is always suspect and needs to be proven. Even gold and the silk mattress are not enough to prove a princess, the "blasted pea" needs to prove the fact. (*Man of Glass* 69)

People are not the only ones who travel. Doreen Massey shows in 'Places and their Pasts' how various places have been intricately connected with each other in the past, and spatially too, are interconnected through trade and commerce. At the beginning of the twenty first century, places cannot be seen in complete seclusion. This suggests that places may not have essential characteristics that are unique to them. Khair in 'Delhi' through images of the Qutub Minar, quotations of Ghalib and Iqbal scribbled on walls in Daryaganj, the portrait of Bahadur Shah Zafar, and Lodi gardens where tombstones have been replaced by Muslims bending in prayer, implicitly shows how Muslim culture came to Delhi, and played a role in forming and shaping the ethos embedded within the city today. (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 23-27) There is an acknowledgement of the influence of Western culture in Hasan's 'England', where "But England never went away", even after a return from England: "We were decidedly different". She shows that after they returned from England, traces such as nursery rhymes, electric kettles, Fair Isle knitting patterns in their lives gradually began to fade, and they stopped listening to E.M. Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy* on tape. She writes, however, that England could not completely go away, and England continued to be a presence in their lives for years afterwards, through the Ice Queen that remained in the middle of the blue book of fairy tales, old Thomas Hardy novels, and the legacy which brought Pink Floyd and Philip Larkin to mind while hearing ghazals. She ends by questioning: "This idiotic recollecting, this tender ache just below our / breathing – what should we do with England?" (*Street on the Hill* 18-19) The presence of England in their lives is inescapable, even if they do not know what to do with it. 'Time of my Childhood' shows the middle-class legacy of Christopher Robin, Alice in Wonderland, Captain Nemo, and piano keys that were as much a part of lived reality as were the monkey trainer and the sweet shop owner. (*Street on the Hill* 6) Khair's 'A Letter' too depicts dual legacies: "We carry two pasts on our back and half a future." As he returns home to his grandmother from Europe, he feels that he is an Indian, but not quite an Indian, a son, but not fully a son, a poet, but only almost a poet. He feels that he does not really belong anymore, neither here nor there. He has forgotten his grandmother's tongue, and his language is strange to her. Later in the day, he is again made aware of this inherent duality because he writes in English instead of Urdu. *The Times of India* seeks to blame



English for all the various ills that the country is beset with. Ashamed to say that Indo-English was the language he thought in, he writes that he is from a “silenced generation”:

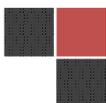
We who belong and do not belong, Trine,
 We who are dead (but not quite)
 We who are empty (but not quite)
 We who are silent (but not quiet)
 We who found silence in search of song. (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 27-29)

They do not really belong on either side, they are somewhere in the middle where there is only silence, because words for expression cannot be found. Khair’s ‘Lichi’ again shows the spatial interconnectedness between places as it shows an Indian eating canned and tinned lichis in Copenhagen, without their bruised green-red peels. They lie in the can, white and flabby floating inside preservative juice. Only, “You still spat stones out.” (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 44) Lichis can be bought in Copenhagen, just as well as in India, but the experience and the feel of eating them is entirely different. People are not the only ones who travel. In ‘An Indian Peels Onions in Europe’, Khair again shows us patterns of acculturation and set ways of doing routine chores such as peeling onions:

I was supposed to slice them,
 But I decided to peel them to the core.
 (we Indians are ancient philosophers-
 Onions are an existential dilemma to us.)
 ...
 the onion diminished, like life does with the years,
 layers fell away under my probing fingers.
 At the end, there was nothing to hold, to show...
 except, of course, the inevitable tears in the eyes. (*A Reporter’s Diary* 21)

Here, the poem links the way Indians peel onions to a philosophical way of life. And yet, perhaps this assumption of an intrinsic philosophy is something false, and at the end of peeling layers of onion, we are left with nothing but emptiness and tears. The poem shows how Khair, a migrant, carries within him dual legacies of India and Europe, just as he carries dual legacies of Urdu and English. The question that is raised here is whether he belongs to both India and Europe, or whether he really and completely belongs to neither.

The paper has examined frontiers as being both dividers and connectors of places, and how our lived and experiential relationship with these places makes us view the inclusion and exclusion created by these frontiers in different ways. In Part II, I examined whether the amorphous spaces which we pass enroute to our destination can also be viewed in different ways: as lived and experienced places, or as abstract space. Sometimes people view places as amorphous spaces just because they see them as being routine and monotonous. On the other hand, tourists (as opposed to travellers) seem to pass through places superficially, without really experiencing them. Thus, the difference is in our own attitudes, and not merely in what relationship we occupy with the places. The last section discussed the dual legacies of those who have been migrants and immigrants at one point of time or another, how multiple cultures are an integral part of them, and yet how they can never wholly feel that they “belong” to any one culture.



Notes:

ⁱⁱⁱA moment comes when people in general leave the *space of consumption*, which coincides with the historical locations of capital accumulation, with the space of production, and with the space that is produced, this is the space of the market, the space through which flows follow their paths, the space which the state controls- space, therefore, that is strictly quantified. When people leave this space, they move towards the *consumption of space* (an unproductive form of consumption.) This moment is the moment of departure - the moment of people's holidays, formerly a contingent but now a necessary moment. When this moment arrives, 'people' demand a qualitative space. The qualities they seek have names: sun, snow, sea. Whether these are natural or simulated matters little. Neither spectacle nor mere signs are acceptable. What is wanted is materiality and naturalness as such, rediscovered in their (apparent or real) immediacy."

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