**(Be)longing in the Digital Age: Diaspora Poetry and the Imaginary Homeland**

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**Background**

By engaging with the work of contemporary emerging and established poets with roots across the Indian subcontinent, I nuance an understanding of South Asian poetry in the Canadian diaspora. Punjabi-Canadian Instapoet rupi kaur dominates the space of “South Asian diaspora poetry,” but many writers, especially women poets at the start of their careers, are overlooked in a western literary space that does not allow room for multiple voices on the same overarching theme. Although they come from a similar starting point, these poets grapple with intersections of femininity, patriarchy, queerness, and illness. Each produces work unique to their own experiences with the world, and cannot be whittled down into a monolith of a singular diaspora.

**Research Methods**

My research was twofold. The first step I took was reading theoretical work on the South Asian diaspora as well as the postcolonial state to gain an understanding of the themes I outlined in my proposal, including memory, nostalgia, postcolonialism, home, identity, and politics.

Mrinalini Chakravorty explores the fraught role of stereotypes in the South Asian literary imagination, as people are both fetishized by stereotype while also being complicit in reproducing it. This brings into question the notion of authenticity and gatekeeping in regards to cultural identity. In “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion,” Gayatri Gopinath discusses how women’s bodies are the site of nationalistic discourse in the context of Partition. Their bodies are places of both violence and enshrinement, and in both cases, women are stripped of their own agency. Gopinath addresses how women poets resist hegemonic constructions of identity in both the home and the diaspora. These questions of personal identity are firmly rooted in the construction of the nation-state in a neocolonial, capitalist world, where performing stereotypes serves the process of control in the modern empire.

Within this theoretical framework, women poets in the South Asian diaspora are not simply concerned with a one-dimensional longing for a lost homeland. I selected a corpus of eight poets with roots from different national, cultural, and linguistic ties to the Indian subcontinent. I conducted interviews with four of the poets: Namitha Rathinapillai, Nisha Patel, Ramna Safeer, and Ayesha Chatterjee. I asked questions about the priorities and intersections they explore in their work. Patel said of writing on nostalgia, one of the prevalent themes in diaspora poetry: “those are experiences we have to honour because many diaspora poets go through that period as part of their transformation where they write about their identity so much that eventually that becomes a foundation for them to accept other intersections.”

**Conclusions**

New writers with diasporic connections face expectations of needing to engage with identity as a way to break into the literary world. Many of these writers are at the beginning of their career, and I worked with their chapbooks as my area of study. Poetry is a medium that lends itself to fluidity, and so is a natural space for writers to work through their plural identities. Themes like diasporic nostalgia persist because it gives poets a pathway into the literary world. From here they can branch out into exploring the multifaceted and inherently political nature of identity.

**Future Research**

The interviews I conducted were key in reaching a conclusion of the presence of nuanced and multiple priorities that South Asian women writers in the diaspora hold. I intend to carry out further interviews to hear the differing experiences. I will publish these interviews in literary journals to bring the conversation of nuancing the diaspora to the literary space from which it emerges.