



Cultural Hybridity and Female Identity in Kavita Daswani's *Salaam Paris*

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Abstract:

*The transnationalism has become the key aspect of the globalised lives in the international space. The women writers are the insiders who can present the transnational dilemma of the identity crisis in an explorative way. The present paper attempts to explore Daswani's diasporic narrative *Salaam Paris* in the light of changing locations and identities. It examines various dimensions such as geographical, cultural, national, linguistic, ethnic, social, and religious locations. The protagonist, Anaya Shah, is a young and beautiful Muslim girl from Mahim, a suburb of Mumbai. She develops a fascination for fashion and modeling, which she gradually achieves through her beauty, courageous attitude, and determination. Through her journey as a model, she travels across different national and international locations while also exploring her own identity. However, being born into an orthodox Muslim family, she faces numerous restrictions, accusations, and labels as she enters the world of fashion and glamour. This study examines character and society in contemporary literature, specifically focusing on Indian immigrants in the United States.*

Keywords: *Transnational Feminism, Transnationalism, Identity Crisis, Transnational Dilemma*

Introduction:

The main problems explored in Transnational Feminist literature include alienation, acculturation, cultural differences, and the struggle to form a new sense of identity. Kavita Daswani's parents were Indian immigrants who had settled in Hong Kong; therefore, she can be called as second generation diaspora. A new generation of wealthy, worldly, and frequently Indian diasporic writers has emerged in English-language publishing, many of whom are women authors. Their primary concern is exploring the upheaval, dissolution, and marginalization that immigrants and their offspring inevitably face. One of the most significant changes in contemporary literature is the emergence of a woman-centered or feminist perspective.

In a few of her writings, the main character desperately wants to avoid getting

married. Daswani argues that marriage can occur at any age, but it is very important for each individual to carefully choose their life partner. This belief motivates the protagonist to pursue an advanced degree in the United States.

Kavita Daswani is one of the contemporary diasporic writers who moves within an international space. Due to her profession as a fashion correspondent for leading magazines and publications, she has been associated with major cosmopolitan cities around the world. This exposure brings the world of fashion and glamour into her narratives. Her writings are generally categorized as *chick-lit*; however, a deeper reading reveals that Daswani portrays the struggles of the younger generation—particularly teenage Indian girls and newly married women—who try to establish their comfort zone and identity in international spaces.

Kavita Daswani is a contemporary writer of the Indian diasporic community who was born in Hong Kong, China. She represents the second generation of migrants, as she was born to Indian parents originally from Mumbai, the cosmopolitan capital city of Maharashtra. As a diasporic writer, she can be seen as an individual who crosses the borders of many nations. Daswani lived in Hong Kong for nearly thirty years and began her career as a fashion journalist at the age of seventeen.

After her marriage, she moved to the United States of America and settled there. Currently, she works as a fashion correspondent for CNN International, CNBC Asia, and Women's Wear Daily. She has also written for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, among many other publications, and previously served as the fashion editor of the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong.

Her life and professional profile reflect elements of cultural hybridity, multiculturalism, migration, transnationalism, and multilingualism. Although her family originally belongs to Mumbai, India, she grew up in Hong Kong and later settled in the United States. At present, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two sons. Her stories have appeared in several well-known publications such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Vogue India*, and *Entrepreneur* magazine.

Kavita Daswani's diasporic experiences are also reflected in her literary works. Her first novel, *For Matrimonial Purposes*, was published in 2003. The novel explores the anxiety of a family regarding the marriage of their unmarried daughter, Anju, who is the central character of the story. Despite the best efforts of her relatives, fortune-tellers, and matchmakers to arrange a suitable marriage, Anju is unable to find a husband. As a result, she faces cultural

marginalization and is labeled a spinster by her community.

Feeling judged and considered a failure by society, Anju longs to escape the restrictive environment of her community and search for better opportunities in America. Through this narrative, Daswani portrays the conflict between traditional Indian expectations and the modern freedoms available in the West. Drawing from her own experiences as a successful print journalist and fashion correspondent on national television, Daswani made a remarkable debut as a novelist with this humorous and heartwarming story of a young woman navigating between the strict customs of India and the liberating lifestyle of America.

Kavita Daswani's novel *The Village Bride of Beverly Hills* (2004) narrates the story of a village girl who moves to California after marriage to fulfill the role of a dutiful wife and a traditional daughter-in-law. Initially confined to domestic responsibilities such as cooking and household chores, she struggles to adjust to her new life in a foreign land. When she does not conceive immediately, she begins working, which gradually provides her with a sense of independence and a private space of freedom. Through this narrative, Daswani questions the reliability of marriage, the dynamics of male–female relationships, and the stability of familial ties.

Daswani later published her first Young Adult novel, *A Girl Named Indie*. Her works have been translated into seventeen languages, reflecting their popularity and wide readership. Primarily targeting young readers, her novels are often categorized as “chick lit.” However, beneath their entertaining surface, they explore serious issues such as marriage, especially the institution of arranged marriage in India and the numerous expectations associated with it. Daswani critically examines the cultural and

ethnic bonds that shape marital relationships in Indian society. Her female protagonists often experience the freedom of life in the United States while simultaneously confronting the socio-cultural expectations rooted in Indian traditions.

A recurring theme in Daswani's fiction is the search for the 'ideal' life partner. While her female characters frequently achieve glamorous and successful careers abroad, they often turn back to their homeland in search of a suitable partner, only to find that the match does not meet their personal expectations. This tension between professional independence and traditional marital expectations forms a central thematic strand in her works. The vibrant book covers—often featuring fashionable women against bright backgrounds—symbolize postmodern sensibilities, cultural hybridity, youth, romance, and feminism, elements that appeal particularly to younger readers. Despite their stylish presentation, Daswani emphasizes that her novels go beyond stories of fashion and glamour; they engage with cross-cultural experiences and intellectual interactions across societies.

Daswani's novel *Salaam Paris* (2006) further explores generational and cultural conflicts within the diasporic context. The story revolves around Tanaya Shah, a young Indian Muslim woman who dreams of Paris after repeatedly watching the film *Sabrina*. Her traditional upbringing and the expectation of an arranged marriage are challenged when she unexpectedly rises to fame as the world's first Muslim supermodel. Through Tanaya's journey, Daswani portrays the struggles faced by a woman positioned within multiple layers of marginalization related to diaspora, religion, gender, and family expectations.

The narrative also reflects Daswani's engagement with multiple fields such as fashion, journalism, travel, and literature. Her close

association with the fashion industry allows her to depict its vibrant and unpredictable nature, while her journalistic background brings precision and contemporary relevance to her storytelling. Consequently, her novels capture the changing realities of diasporic Indian communities, particularly in relation to marriage, women's roles within families, and the growing opportunities for women beyond domestic boundaries. Blending humor with cultural tension, Daswani presents unconventional 'desi' heroines who challenge traditional norms in their pursuit of personal fulfillment.

Salaam Paris centers on Tanaya Shah, a young woman from Mahim, a suburb of Mumbai. Raised by her mother and grandfather, Tanaya develops a strong bond with her grandfather, who provides her with affection and support after her mother becomes emotionally distant due to her own troubled past. Fascinated by Western fashion magazines and influenced by global popular culture, Tanaya dreams of traveling abroad and experiencing a life beyond the limitations of her conservative environment.

Her opportunity arrives when her grandfather arranges a marriage proposal from Tariq Khan, who lives in Paris. Seeing this as a gateway to the world she has long imagined, Tanaya travels to Paris. However, instead of conforming to traditional expectations, she gradually enters the modeling industry. Initially working as a waitress, she eventually rises to prominence and becomes the first Muslim supermodel in the international fashion world.

Despite her success, Tanaya experiences emotional conflicts. While Paris provides her with independence, fame, and financial stability, she continues to feel a deep connection to her homeland and her grandfather. Memories of her childhood in Mahim constantly resurface, reflecting the diasporic tension between belonging and displacement. She struggles to

reconcile her new cosmopolitan identity with the cultural and religious values she grew up with.

Tanaya's journey highlights the complexities of diasporic identity. Although she achieves recognition and success abroad, she remains emotionally tied to her family and cultural roots. Her eventual return to India to see her ailing grandfather reveals her longing for reconciliation and acceptance. However, his inability to fully forgive her leaves her feeling disconnected from her ancestral home. Ultimately, Tanaya's decision to marry Tariq reflects her desire to reconnect with her familial and cultural heritage.

Through Tanaya's story, Daswani illustrates the paradox of diaspora: the simultaneous feeling of belonging to multiple places yet fully belonging to none. Tanaya's

nostalgia for home and her dissatisfaction with its restrictions reveal the complex emotional state of being both 'homesick' and 'sick of home.' In this way, *Salaam Paris* captures the psychological and cultural tensions experienced by diasporic individuals negotiating identity, tradition, and modernity in a globalized world.

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