



## A Rhizometric and Anti-Foundational Analysis of Mitali Perkins's *You Bring the Distant Near*

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### ABSTRACT

The current study is aimed to investigate *You Bring the Distant Near* written by an energetic fiction writer from Calcutta, India, Mitali Perkins to highlight the thematic expression of postmodern fragmentation. Rejection of metanarratives has caused all the previously held notions and norms to be toppled down to portray the rhizometric and anti-foundational fragments along with their effects in the society. There is an exploration of specific theoretical assumptions of legendary postmodernists like Jean Francois Lyotard, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the selected text. The selected text is investigated through the lens of rhizome by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and incredulity toward metanarrative by Jean Francois Lyotard. Based on comprehensive textual analysis, this qualitative research proves that *You bring the Distant Near* holds authoritative traits of fragmentation, disintegration, chaos, and anarchy under the worldview of postmodernism by endeavoring to highlight rhizometric and anti-foundational fractals in this novel.

**Key Words:** Postmodernism, Metanarratives, Fragmentation, Local issues

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## 1. Introduction

Fragmentation is perhaps the best image of twentieth century that is observable with two different methodologies. First half of this century is known as modernism and the second half is designated as postmodernism. Postmodernism has rejected all the metanarratives and mega structures of modernism as well as pre-modern epochs. Fragmentation is the distortion of aggregating, widespread or progressive orders and systems that are abusive, ruthless and brutal in their imposition due to its universality. Various postmodern scholars spread these philosophical ideas with various arrangements. Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari take this issue in analysis and use expertly clashing articulations to deconstruct the developments of modernism.

Jean-Franco Lyotard was the first postmodern philosopher who “put postmodern cat among modern pigeons” (Woods, 2011, p. 19). He has gone against modernity by using the terminologies “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 24), and “fracta” (p. 60). He is of the view that “our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known what is known as postmodern age” (p. 3). He has analyzed the grand narratives of modernism like Marxism, Enlightenment, Capitalism and Psychoanalyses and reflects the brutality of metanarratives in their totalizing execution. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the two poststructuralist philosophers attack Marxism and Psychoanalysis in their mutually composed book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Both the scholars of the contemporary social investigations have assigned fragmentation by utilizing the metaphors like “rhizome”, “schizo” and “deterritorialized body” (1980, p.56) to prove that modernism has faith in fixities and permanencies, which bring about concealment. They claimed that postmodern self is not fixed or static rather it is unsolidified, plural, manifold and decentered.

*You Bring the Distant Near* follows three generations of ladies from an Indian American family representing the difficulties faced by the major characters of the novel during their migration to several countries covering the time epoch from 1965 to 2006. To get help for her pursuers, Perkins has involved a little genealogy at the front of the book. The novel under analysis follows Ranee Das who is the mother of Tara (Starry) and Sonia (Sunny) Das and





grandma to their girls, Anna (Anu) Sen and Chantal (Shanti) Johnson respectively. The novel opens in 1965 with Sonia, the only dark-skinned individual at the British Club in Ghana, contributing to a swimming race. Sonia, dominating the race first but finally loses it when Ranee pulls her rashly from the water. Unambiguously, Mitali Perkins has divided her novel into three fragments ultimately representing three generations, one in each part.

Part one Strangers starts when Das family shifts from London, England to New York where they settle in an apartment in Flushing, the most disliked place just due to the majority of black populaces. This part ends when Tara joins theatre and Sonia's progress in math, physics and English is fine. Part two Travelers tells about the struggle of Das family to survive after the death of Baba in an accident. Some people pressurize Ranee to go back to Kolkata, but she chooses to stay in New York. Sonia wins an essay contest and goes to a trip to Paris where she falls in love with Lou Johnson, a football player. Tara goes to Bangladesh to dispatch her father's ashes in the Ganges where she meets Amit Sen, the boy whose marriage request was rejected twice by her. This part ends when Sonia elopes with Lou and lives separately from her mother. Part third Settlers describes the story of Ranee's grandchildren, Anna Sen and Chantal Johnson. The last part of the book is not as captivating as the first. Renee wants to take American citizenship after 9/11 and her endeavors to Americanize herself are fairly stunning. She is completely getting away from her customary standards and traditions which is absolutely a sign of fragmentation and disorder. May this progress be needed to Anu who squeezes into the American life excessively well due to her mother's Americanization. Representing foreigners and strangers, *You Bring the Distant Near* (2017) takes its title from a sonnet *Thou Hast Made Me Known* composed by renowned Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Perkins captures the complicated family's fundamental powers, the consideration and love every individual from the Das family has for each other. The writer also portrays the battle of the characters to recall their culture and principles attempting to comprehend in a new land.

## 2. Research Questions

This research is pursued with the help of the following questions.

1. How does Mitali Perkins highlight the fragmentation of characters in *You Bring the Distant Near*?
2. How far Mitali Perkins is successful in artistically painting the rhizometric and anti-





foundational settings?

3. How does Mitali Perkins depict the conversion of meta-narratives into mini narratives in her novel *You Bring the Distant Near*?

### 3. Research Methodology

The present study is aimed to analyze Mitali Perkin's *You Bring the Distant Near* through the lens of postmodernism with specific theoretical assumptions of legendary philosophers Jean Francois Lyotard, Felix Guattari and Giles Deleuze. The main purpose of this article is to investigate how metanarratives are changed into mini narratives where local issues are given importance rather than believing in any universal truth ultimately causing chaos, anarchy and fragmentation all over the society. The present research is qualitative in tone relying on argumentation rather than survey. Primary source for this research is based on Mitali Perkin's masterpiece *You Bring the Distant Near* and secondary sources are internet, some oriented articles, magazines and other books supporting my hypothesis.

### 4. Data Analysis

Mitali Perkins has woven splendid patches of psychological fragmentations of various characters in the texture of the novel *You Bring the Distant Near* due to some unpleasant events. The author has handled the colossal emotive and psychosomatic mutilation along the most disconcerting conditions of all shell-shocked main characters including Tara who is suffering from shock and attends to aftermaths of her dad's death harshly. In *Sonia: Liberation*, Mitali portrays the image of psychological damages done to Tara through the expressions of Sonia as 'she eats more than she used to, and dresses differently, like she doesn't really care about attention' (p.114). Sonia's words undoubtedly show that she has taken her father's death to heart which has scattered her life routine badly in the same way as the significant principle of postmodernism has broken down the idea of metanarratives. Sonia's psychological fragmentation can also be depicted when she 'stops singing completely' even she needs it badly for her rehearsal to win the competition, but she is not in a condition to handle it properly, so she leaves caring about anything which shows her psychological fragmentation and anarchy at its peak.

In America, while performing the 'shradh ceremony' of her dad, every deviation of the characters from American ethnic guidelines is akin to postmodernists' approach to meta narratives. Lyotard asserts "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard, 1984, p.37) and





same is the situation with a Hindu priest ‘wearing blue jeans, a kurta, and a saffron scarf draped around his neck’ (p. 98) who performs all the customs of shradh rite of Mr. Rajeev Das. Das family wants to perform shradh ceremony of Mr. Rajeev in an ideal manner considering it as a Big Harm as per their social requirements however he is conflicting with American culture. Mohan, the child of a Pundit employed by Tara acts as “a postmodern cat among the modernist pigeons” (Woods, 2011, p.19) conflicting with Indian culture which has nothing to do with any traditional and ethnic principles and performs everything according to his own freewill and choices. Under the psychological tension and pressure, Sonia, describes the contradictory character and getup of Mohan who goes to the service without his dad Prohit because of an ailment and he conflicts with the guidelines of authentic Indian Pundit by their actual appearance. Sitting leg over leg on the hearth is a youngster wearing pants, a kurta, and a saffron scarf hung around his neck and is grinning as though he is going to direct a wedding rather than a shradh service. ‘He’s bearded, his kurta is unbuttoned, and three gold disco chains adorn his hairy chest’. All these deviations interrupt Sonia’s psychology as Mohan behaves as postmodernist who has toppled down all the previously held ideas, customs, traditions and standards. Moreover, Sonia revealed that there was a strange and specific unaffordable fragrance coming from Mohan as he was having ‘marijuana’. Having these drugs additionally takes Mohan in the resistance bunch who could not care about any standards or guidelines so eventually the entire of his exercises including his abusing getup adds to the psychological concerns of Sonia. Destruction, fragmentation and rejection of the mega structures lead Mitali Perkins to access the “dissolution of the social bond” (Lyotard, 1984, p.15) which further prompts the psychological fragmentation of the characters explicitly discussing the chaotic text of *You Bring the Distant Near*.

In the Anna: United Cousins of Carver School, Mitali portrays an illustration of rhizometric character which shows that they lost their Bengali culture and embraced American civilization completely. Tara gives an obligation to her mom for her daughter Anna’s affirmation in New York’s Carver School; even Anna does not like to study abroad but her mother compels her to go to America and study there. Chantal, Sonia’s daughter is born and brought up in America, so she has barely any familiarity with Bengali culture and traditions even she knows nothing how to communicate in Bengali. Her dressing, talking, and living style is purely like





Americans. At the first day of Carver School in America, Anna wears salwar kameez. Chantal's friends tease Anna and say, 'a petite Bengali girl in a salwar'. Others say to Chantal that her cousin is tiny, 'like an Indian doll'. She sees somebody behind her to say, 'she looks like a peanut'. Whereas she disregards their voices and concentrates on badminton match and after badminton, she receives a timetable where time was mentioned for taking bath before second class. Whenever Anna goes into the locker room, she notices it is a wide, open spot, brimming with strong metallic tiles. She was stunned when she understands that there is no 'hidden corner for privacy' and no different spot for shower. Indeed 'privies' withdrew uniquely through short dividers.

She is additionally stunned, when she saw her cousin and other class colleagues 'start taking off their clothes right in front of each other'. They felt no hesitation to off their 'shorts, shirts, bars, and underwear' so she feels embarrassed to see them bare. She converts her face into a wall and pretends that she focuses on class schedule even does not remember ever she has seen a bare body in her entire life. After a specific stage, Bengali girls are not allowed to see others as bare, not even sisters or companions. As all above-mentioned events are not following any specific rules or directions so same is the case with the term rhizome defined by renowned postmodernists, Guattari and Deleuze. According to them, "a rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes" (1987, p. 7). Just like rhizome new generation does not like to follow any old traditions and laws as Shanti feels no humiliation to talk or visit with companions in bare body. Anna could do like Shanti's body in 'tiny bikini' and calls her 'dark satin skin' and considers her as 'pretty ugly'. Chantal is fundamentally attached with Bengali culture, but she has never ever visited India or Bengal and stayed in America only. That is the reason, she has hardly any insight into Bengali culture and their traditional values. She takes on American way of life and never feels shame to show her body bare in front of others as she does just what she needs and pursues no course like rhizome following no specific commands in the expansion of roots in so many directions.

In the *Sonia: Fire Escape*, Mitali portrays rhizometric characteristics in Sonia, the youngest daughter of Das family who tries to break all the rules enforced by her mother. Her mother does not permit her to go outside the apartment, but Sonia wants liberty and says, 'in the Land of the Free for four months and Ma continues to forbid me from going out alone'. Baba





does not care either I go outside alone. Sonia needs to compose in privacy but within the concern of Das family she cannot compose even a solitary. That is why she needs parting, so she observes a risky and unprotected place. ‘Outside our bedroom window, my sanctuary waits—airy and open, made of red railings and blue sky’. She picks the place extremely down to window; ‘as high as the roof’ which is across the fire escape and climbs fire escape practically every mid-evening. Window railings are extremely difficult to sit for extensive stretch, yet she takes care of this issue by observing a faded quilt from their building’s pantry’. As a matter of first importance, she violates the law, which is forced by her mother. She breaks the directions, ignores the law, and rejects the system which is the ideal illustration of rhizome wherein each root dismisses any precise methodology and continues in un-projected headings. Following rhizometric features, she pursues no bearing and conflicts with her mother’s recommendation. In this manner, rhizome works as indicated by the rule of variety since it “flows in myriads directions constituting a network of multiplicities (Woods, 2011, p. 32). Sonia is an Indian Bengali young girl who lives in New York where she fails to keep her social guidelines. She makes an American companion not only boyfriend but more than a friend and claims that her boyfriend ‘still keeps trying to move us into romantic territory’. Gerald, Sonia’s boyfriend is very much like ‘terrible Romeo’ and consistently needs a close connection with her and submitting to his sweetheart, Sonia is profoundly engaged with illicit connections. The entire episode demonstrates that how genuinely she substantiates herself as rhizometric or wanderer specialists who appreciate abusing the regulations and adhere to reject any particular arrangement of guidelines.

In the ‘Tara, Flushing Forever’ Mitali talks about how the significant characters of the novel affirm the refusal of metanarratives of Indian culture. Sonia and her boyfriend Gerald are simply companions however he comes into her flat only in the absence of Sonia’s parents. He prefers Sonia and ‘wants to be more than friends’. At Saturday morning, Sonia’s parents, Mr. Rajeev Das and Mrs. Ranee Das go to New Jersey to track down another house for them so their daughter Tara goes to the recreation area to appreciate her boyfriend Eric and offers cigarette to her companion Karen, ‘If they were driving past the park and see me sitting on Eric’s lap or sharing a cigarette with Karen, I’d be dead’. Tara’s good luck that her family was not to pass the park area because there were strict restrictions on her to go outside. This shows that in the wake







of going to New York, they change their way of life against the standard set of directions and do not bother to follow any specific rule defined by their ethnic narratives. Both sisters, Sonia and Tara, are deeply associated with illicit relationships with young men even they hit the dance floor with one another and appreciate with their body. Whenever they shift Flushing to New Jersey, Gerald needs Sonia not to move from there even her mother convinces him that 'It's high time for us to leave'. Her mother called him Negro and tells her how this Negro kid looks you my sweet little girl. Sonia contends her mother that, 'nobody calls him 'Negroes' anymore' but her mother realizes her daughter to 'remember that you girls come from an educated family in Bengal'. According to Sonia, 'We're not Bengal anymore. There is no caste system in America'. The two of them contend on individuals of color, as indicated by her mom, 'black people are the lowest caste in this country'.

On the other hand, David, Tara's companion gets mournful when he knows about the departure of her girlfriend. On last Saturday when MA, Baba and Sonia, go to market to buy new things for new house, David and Tara appreciate sluggish moving in Jenny's condo. 'David and I are slow-dancing in Jenny's apartment to 'Let's Stay Together,' and his strong, slim body is pressing hard against mine'. She feels loosen up when he contacts her body and at that point, David murmurs in Tara's ear, 'I Love You, Tara'. All the above conversation shows that the two young ladies have unlawful actual fascination towards young men. Lyotard states in his short essay that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard, 1984, p.37) endorsing limited and fleeting information in the current world because his chief objective of assault is on metanarratives which control the individual, so they ought to be stayed away from them because they are tyrannical in nature. All the metanarratives are changed into mini narratives and this reconciliation or fragmentation of the mega structures directs a few essayists to look at the "dissolution of the social bond" (p.15) in the light of the fact that social bond is comprised by a "set of pragmatic rules" forced by these narratives (p.21). Last scene of this segment is exceptionally enthusiastic and heart touching because David is not the only heartbroken abandon but Gerald as well sobs and yells Sonia to 'come back and visit' whereas on the other hand Sonia additionally sobs and does not have any desire to leave. Be that as it may, 'Mama rolls up her window and doesn't ask questions'.

Last scene additionally shows that Ms. Ranee Das, acting as a pure postmodern character,







is not stressed over her girl's illicit relationship with young men that is quite illegal according to their religious, social and moral metanarratives due to which she poses no inquiry to Sonia. Keeping all above-mentioned events following modernist characteristics in view, it is quite suitable to state that no Indian culture and customs are presented in their foreign ways of life because they are completely American now. Tara's hitting the dance floor with David, Sonia's relationship with Gerald more than companions, satisfactory response of their mother on such illegal relationships, their boyfriends' wishes to keep their lover there, all these events show that postmodernism rejects all these universal metanarratives which are tyrannical in nature, and everything has started to revolve around discontinuity and incoherence. In the selected novel, Mitali Perkins has focused on the local issues of the people which are disregarded by authoritarian metanarratives and totalitarian. "The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged" (Lyotard, 1984, p.4) keeping the general change in view so with the passage of time, the entire scenario is changed due to reestablishment of mega structures into fragments.

## 5. Conclusion

The goal of my study was to derive different components of postmodern fragmentation implanted in the novel *You Bring the Distant Near*. After comprehensive study of the selected text through the lens of postmodern fragmentation, it appears that Perkins has composed this novel keeping in view the theoretical ideologies of Jean Francois Lyotard, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In data analysis, I have argued in detail that each of these theorists has treated the subject of postmodern fragmentation by utilizing the terms like incredulity towards metanarrative, rhizomatic and psychological fragmentation to demonstrate primary perspectives of postmodern subject. We see that nearly all the major characters in the novel appear to be impervious to aggregation or universalization that controls them.

To prove the first hypothesis of psychological fragmentation in *You Bring the Distant Near*, Mitali Perkins has applied the events of Sonia's mental trauma because her mother's inconsistent attitude, aftermaths of her father's death on Tara and Sonia's mind and many other events confirm the researcher's hypothesis of psychological fragmentation to be true to its great extent. Sonia, the main character of this novel experiences mental pressure and anxiety due to her mother's rude and disregarding attitude towards her in almost every patch in the texture of the woven text. Tara also faces psychological fragmentation after the death of her father and





faces numerous psychological damages. In this way, the researcher confirms that the hypothesis of psychological fragmentation of the characters is clearly highlighted and proved to be genuine in *You Bring the Distant Near*. Psychological disorder of almost all the major characters in the selected text verifies the presence of psychological fragmentation at its peak.

To verify the second hypothesis artistically rhizometric and anti-foundational in its expressions, Perkins discusses all the characters as rhizometric and anti-foundational because they all disregard the rules and laws of an organized system as defined by any authoritarian. Tara, the leading character proves herself as anti-foundational because she never adheres to any guidelines or instructions set by an association. In Bengali culture, theatre is not a good career for young girls but when Tara shows her desire to select a theater, her father does not refuse her to work in theatre rather than appreciates her in contrary to his traditional, conventional and religious moralities. The researcher also highlights Sonia's revolutionary action because she breaks down all the rules and restrictions imposed by her mother and wants freedom to go outside alone following her own free will with no limitations or defined boundaries. In the same way, all the main characters forget their original culture and are confused with new American culture so in a free atmosphere, they cross all their religious and cultural limitations and become postmodernists by accepting its salient characteristics. Like first hypothesis, the researcher verifies the second hypothesis of rhizometric and anti-foundational settings in *You Bring the Distant Near* to its maximum.

Researcher's third hypothesis is related to the conversion of the metanarrative into mini narratives in *You Bring the Distant Near*. Perkins's choice of diction also shows the conversion of metanarratives into mini narratives by her major characters in the selected text. The relationship of Sonia and Gerald, Sonia's friend, are more than friends and they relish the company of each other. Tara is involved in unlawful relationship with David, Tara's boyfriend, and they enjoyed close dancing at Jenny's flat. Chantal, Sonia's daughter, feels no embarrassment when she removes her dress and starts cleaning up in front of other girls. Chantal's bold attitude and her liberal approach of living clearly presents that she disrespects their forefathers' way of life. Here, researcher very powerfully demonstrates that Sonia, Tara, their boyfriends, Chantal and other characters reject the set guidelines of metanarratives and affirm that they are purely postmodernist in their imposition. All the standard set of rules defined





by tyrannical metanarratives and mega structures are rejected by all the characters of the novel.

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