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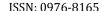
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Geographic Dislocation and Adolescent Psyche in Nidhi Chanani's Pashmina

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intricate relationship between geographical dislocation and adolescent psyche, as depicted in Nidhi Chanani's graphic novel, *Pashmina*. This study focuses on the protagonist Priyanka, an Indian American teenager, who is struggling with her cultural identity and sense of belonging. By undertaking multidisciplinary approaches this research explores how displacement and the search for belonging shaped the adolescent experience. Through a close reading of the novel via analysing the visual and textual elements, this paper aims to highlight how elements of magical realism in the story serve as a metaphor for Priyanka's internal world and her quest for connection with her past, while adumbrating the fact of how the dislocation impacts perception, mental health and identity formation. Thereby, the findings of this work aim to contribute to the broader discourse on migration literature and adolescence psychology by offering insights on how geographical dislocation impacts the mental health and identity of young individuals in multicultural settings.

Keywords: Adolescent Psyche, Geographical Dislocation, Identity Crisis, Magical Realism, Pashmina.

The phenomenon of geographical dislocation significantly impacts the psychological development of adolescents, particularly those navigating the complex terrains of cultural identity and belonging. We can perceive that in Nidhi Chanani's graphic novel *Pashmina*, the protagonist Priyanka's experiences highlight the emotional and mental challenges confronted by young immigrants. This endeavour aims to provide a thorough analysis of this graphic novel, and also to uncover the ways in which Chanani portrays the psychological struggles and identity crises of an adolescent immigrant. This paper will examine the interplay between the visual and textual elements of the novel to illustrate how the protagonist's experiences of dislocation and cultural conflict are depicted and resolved.

Nidhi Chanani was born in Kolkata in the year 1980 and grew up in Southern California which is reflected in her work where she displays a unique blend of her heritage and her American upbringing. The author uses beautiful illustrations while portraying everyday moments in a beautiful story buoyed by her Indian roots. The illustrations manifested in her work are known for their warmth and humour with diverse and relatable characters. Her debut novel, *Pashmina*, released in 2017, has gathered critical acclaim and become a huge success which was marked as a significant turning point. *Pashmina* received starred reviews in *Publisher's Weekly*, the New York Times and was a Junior Selection Guild. The protagonist of the novel, Priyanka Das, a first-generation immigrant, is a mere teenager with many unanswered questions. The predominant questions about her father and other relatives, or why her mother left home are the topics avoided by Pri's mother. When her mother tries to escape thinking about her homeland Pri yearns to learn and connect with her roots which she can only imagine. Until she discovers a magical pashmina shawl which transports her to a colourful and magical India, it continues to haunt her. Her other graphic novels include *Jukebox*, an early reader series *Shark Princess* and her latest project, *Super Boba Cafe*.

Graphic novels are a unique and captivating form of storytelling that combines visual art with narrative storytelling which creates immersive and engaging reading experiences. Although these are often associated with comics, graphic novels distinguish themselves through their longer format, complex narratives, and thematic depth. *Pashmina* is a heartwarming coming-of-age story that explores the themes such as a person's identity, self-discovery and cultural identity with magical realism. The usage of colour is particularly noteworthy, with each scene and setting imbued with its distinct palette that reflects the mood and tone of the story. From the warm, earthy tones of India to the cool, muted hues of America, the colours in *Pashmina* evoke a sense of place and atmosphere that immerses readers in Pri's world. Although it is not explicitly classified as a magic realism novel, it contains elements of magic realism that enrich the narrative and deepen its exploration of themes such as identity,



cultural heritage, and the power of storytelling. The narrative can be viewed through the lens of magic realism, a literary genre that blends fantastical elements with realistic settings and characters, creating a sense of wonder and mystery that challenges readers' perceptions of reality. This titular pashmina shawl, a magical artifact in the novel, serves as a conduit between the ordinary world and the fantastical realm of India. The coinage of the term "pashmina" originates from the Persian word pashmīneh, which is translated to be made from wool, which, in turn, is derived from (pashm), meaning wool. Pashmina refers to a type of fine cashmere wool, and by extension, the textiles and garments made from it.

Geographic dislocation refers to being physically removed from one's homeland either voluntarily, for instance a character choosing to travel or emigrate, either involuntarily or due to war, political unrest or other economic conditions. The notion of dislocation goes beyond just physical movement, it is like the experience of feeling out of place, a kind of disconnection from something familiar and grappling with a sense of loss. Displacement from familiar surroundings can force an individual to question who they are and where they belong. This scenario may result in conflicting cultural values and social norms, as well as feeling like outsiders in both their new and old homes. Etymologically, adolescence is usually considered a period of dramatic, physical and psychological transformation. These complexities of the adolescent psyche can be studied efficiently by delving into themes of identity crisis, rebellion, self-discovery and a sense of belonging. These issues appear to be the most prominent themes, where the characters are struggling with identity. Adolescent people struggle with who they are, what they want to be and how they fit into the world.

Priyanka is an Indian American teen who can be perceived as struggling to navigate through an identity crisis, stuck between trying to adapt to the American ways while facing racial discrimination and trying to connect to her Indian roots. Her desire to know about her family and her mother's past increases as her mother stubbornly tries to keep her in the dark to protect her from the ugly truths. Priyanka's family friend, Uncle Jatin is like a friend as well as a father figure, who she sees as a safe place to talk about the things going on with her mother and other things in her life.

One day she suddenly discovers a pashmina shawl in her mother's suitcase hidden in the closet. She also finds a letter written by her mausi, purported to send to her mother which further leads Pri to question her mother about the past and why she remains adamant to hiding it. Pri tells her friend Eddie about the shawl and how it shows the vibrant India to her in the forms of visions guided by Mayur and Kanta. After watching such beautiful visions of India her determination to visit India grows even more. She asks her mother that they can use her prize money, which she won from a comic contest, to visit their homeland. Pri's mother further declines but is convinced by her sister's sudden phone call and decides to let Pri visit her mausi in Kolkata. In an overwhelming manner, Pri remains determined to know about her familial history and why she feels an even stronger pull after discovering the pashmina.

Once she reaches her desired destination she is not as ecstatic as the India in the pashmina seemed very different to the one where she was. After getting several warnings from her mother about how things seem different from afar rather than when seen up-close, she tries to keep an open mind about the things. Her Meena mausi, once upon a time worked as a teacher, who left her job because she was pregnant, takes her for sightseeing and to Jadhaypur school which further leaves Pri disheartened. Pri is shocked and disappointed on seeing that everything is not as vibrant or cheerful as it was portrayed to be. They try to find out the history and the significance behind that pashmina, which stopped showing visions to Pri after she landed in India. After making thorough explorations, they visit a factory in Nagpur where the shawl originated from. During the plane ride Pri decides to ask her mausi about her father, which leads to some surprising revelations. Meena explains how Rahul Pri's biological father convinced Pri's mother Nimisha to marry him and that Pri was actually born out of wedlock. Rahul abandoned Nimisha after gaining knowledge about the situation and arranged for her to leave India to prevent shameful situations. This revelation leads to Pri blaming herself that her mother had to leave her home to which Meena consoles her that she is not at fault and her mother loves her dearly. After some inquiry they reach the factory where they are informed that the shawl is definitely Rohini's work, one of the most skilled workers of the time. On a quest to find the old factory where Rohini worked they are further led to a place in shambles but the place has an aura which invites Pri to investigate. She takes the pashmina which reveals that the magical pashmina is a way goddess Shakti tries to help empower helpless women who can visualize their choices with the help of the shawl. Goddess Shakti further commands Pri to keep passing on the pashmina and to help as many women as she can to empower them. She returns back to America where her mother reveals that she had suspected Pri finding the pashmina and reveals that it was in fact due to the pashmina she decided to move to America as she saw a bright future in the visions. Pri's mother explains how the pashmina glorifies the visions far from reality, and bond how she also fell prey to the dreamy expectations as she explains "I saw America. It was amazing and shiny. It was full of fancy technology and



beautiful buildings. So clean, but that America exists only in the pashmina. Reality is very different!" (Chanani 154)

The book beautifully captures the emotions, the cultures and the art of storytelling. By using beautiful illustrations Chanani has weaved a beautiful narrative that portrays various things including a beautiful relation of a mother with her daughter which portrays alongside the hardships and difference of opinions of teenagers, as well as the discrimination faced by the immigrant people. The narrative is not just about a mere shawl and the history Pri tries to find about her family, rather it is about how a person grows from the experiences and even though things may be deceiving, one should always believe to preserve themselves.

Understanding the adolescent psyche as portrayed in Nidhi Chanani's Pashmina requires a deep dive into the intricate layers of identity, belonging, curiosity, and emotional turmoil experienced by the protagonist, Priyanka Das. In this graphic novel, Chanani beautifully captures the multifaceted nature of adolescence through Priyanka's journey of selfdiscovery. The period of adolescence is a tumultuous one marked by profound changes, both physical and psychological. It is a time when individuals begin to question their identity and place in the world, and Priyanka's story epitomizes this struggle. Being a teenager, the opinion of peers seems to matter a lot and since Priyanka is a person with mixed heritage, she tries even harder to fit in. After facing bullying from her classmates about her name, her culture and the clothes she wears she is frustrated and tries to talk to her mother about it. She is very curious about her own culture and why her mother left India. Her mother is stubborn and always tries to change topic whenever Pri asks about India or her father. Her growing teenager mind grows even more frustrated. When she tries to look for answers, but ends up finding none. Her questions seem to increase when she finds a mysterious, magical pashmina shawl in a suitcase which falls out of her closet. While wearing the pashmina she is transported to a vibrant vision of India the magical transportation being a metaphor to the geographical dislocation her mother has faced and the consequences she faces as well. As she finds a letter in the suitcase with the shawl addressed to her mother written by her mausi she further tries asking questions about her mother's relatives and begs her mother to visit India with the prize money she got from a comic contest.

After arriving in India, Pri expresses her thoughts to her mausi, evident in the conversation, who tries to explain that even if they are in poor conditions they are getting education which will help them in their lives.

I've never been anywhere like that. It was so sad.

Sad? Why? They are learning and that will change their lives, Priyanka. Do not look at the dirt. Look at the people.

But I can't help feeling sad for the girls. My mom told me about the poverty... but it's another thing to see it.

But they are being educated. That is what matters. (Chanani 115)

After some sightseeing she decides to ask her mausi for some answers about the shawl as well as about her mother's past. After deciding to visit Nagpur to look for the answers about the magical pashmina, Priyanka also finds the truth about her father. Priyanka's mausi tells her about her father, Rahul who abandoned her mother when he found out that she was pregnant. He abandoned her even after promising to marry and arranged for her to leave for America to save themselves from humiliation in the society since a child out of wedlock is a taboo and looked down upon. Gaining this knowledge, Priyanka blames herself for her mother's distancing from her family as she could not get to live her life freely in her homeland. Her mausi reassures her that it is not her fault and that her mother loves her and that her biological father was at fault. She even confesses that after witnessing that she gets scared her husband would also leave her if she does not follow him. After knowing the truth Priyanka is extremely angry and tries to divert her mind by focusing on the problem at hand that is finding out answers about the magical pashmina. Her adolescent brain tries to work with so much new information that she feels extremely overwhelmed. They then visit the silk factory in Nagpur where they find out that the shawl was made by a worker named Rohini who was one of the best. After visiting the ruins of the original factory Pri feels a pull towards a hut which looks burnt down. After putting on the Pashmina she finds goddess Shakti telling her to help and empower more and more women by passing down the Pashmina. As the original motive of the pashmina was to help people see what consequences they would face and what choices could help them.

After quite an adventure, Pri returns back to America, to her mother as a changed person. Her mother enquires about the Pashmina which shocks Pri as she thought her mother did not know about it. She confesses that it was the shawl that motivated her to move to America, as she could live a better life with Pri without judgments. But the Pashmina showed only beautiful visions and not the actual truths which both the mother and daughter later realised. This roller coaster of a journey in the book represents how a person grows even with the obstacles provided by life. Pri faces the negative consequences of geographical dislocation



such as bullying because of her race or trying to fit into the American culture while trying to embrace her own culture. Being a teenager is hard in itself but Priyanka shows how strong she is as she pulls through all the obstacles. Even her mother is a strong character who faces her own set of obstacles such as cultural shock due to dislocation. Although the negative impacts of dislocation are more it can be seen that Nimisha (mother) has also benefited and does not live with as much constraints as she would have back in her homeland with the much conservative society.

One of the central themes in the book is Pri's quest for identity. With the progression of the novel, she embarks on a journey to uncover the mysteries of her family's past, particularly surrounding her absent father and the significance of the pashmina shawl her mother kept hidden away in a suitcase. This adventure reflects the character's desire to understand her origin and heritage as well as the search for a sense of belonging and cultural identity. Her curiosity serves as a driving force leading to her exploration of her heritage. Like many adolescents she yearns to fill the gaps in her knowledge and to understand the world around her more deeply. It also led to many conflicts specially with her mother, who seems stubborn and reluctant to reveal the truths about her past. Although she tries to be patient with her daughter showing how strong she is while she explains calmly "life isn't simple anywhere, Priyanka". (Chanani 33)

Pri's conflicting desires to explore and keep things hidden echo the typical tensions between teens and adults. As she seeks independence and defines who she is, this secrecy becomes a common ground for conflicts and clashes of opinions. It reflects the push and pull common in adolescence, where curiosity drives exploration but fear of judgment or disapproval leads to secrecy. Pri, caught between two worlds, is conflicted with the need to fit in at school, her inner battles and other expectations. At school, she faces peer pressure and the desire to fit in with her classmates, who may not fully understand or appreciate her cultural background. The dichotomy between wanting to be accepted and the cultural preservation reflects the challenges that many adolescents from immigrant backgrounds face while simultaneously navigating between multiple worlds and identities.

Emotional turmoil is another prominent part of adolescence and Pri experiences a rollercoaster of emotions throughout the story. She is seen struggling to catch up with all the feelings of confusion, frustration and loneliness as she tries to make sense of her identity and how she fits in the world. She also experiences her share of joyous moments, wonder and connection, particularly when she discovers the truth about her family and embraces her

heritage. Her journey in pashmina is not just a quest for identity but also a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. As she unravels the secrets of her family's past and embraces her cultural heritage, she gains a better and deeper understanding of herself and the world around her. This transformation reflects the process of adolescent development, as individuals navigate the challenges of growing up and forge their own paths forward.

Priyanka being the central character, her mother also serves as a primordial force to the narrative as she is portrayed as a source of strength, wisdom and complexity. The portrayal of the mother's character helps in exploring the themes of heritage and the complexities of a mother-daughter's relationship with the context of dislocation and the psychology of an adolescent. The mother is a complex character who embodies the struggles and triumphs of being an immigrant as well as a single mother navigating through the challenges of raising a daughter in a new country while trying to preserve her cultural heritage. She also plays a model figure in the life, shaping her identity, values and world view through her actions. One of the more defining traits of her mother is her strength and resilience in the face of adversity as an immigrant woman, she has faced challenges and obstacles in her journey to America, including the cultural adjustment, language barriers and economic hardships. Despite these challenges, she remains a strong person, and with determination and grace strives to create a better life for herself and her daughter. Although the resilience is evident in her unwavering commitment to Priyanka, she remains a pillar of strength and stability for her offering, love, support and guidance when she needs it.

Although her mother may not want to talk about her past in India, she is deeply connected to her heritage and culture and ties to instil the same pride and appreciation for their cultural traditions in her daughter. She teaches her about Indian customs and helps her understand and embrace her roots in a foreign place. Although their relationship is characterised by love, conflict and mutual understanding, there are complexities which arise due to the challenges of being an adolescent. Despite the differences and occasional disagreements, Pri and her mother share a deep bond which can be seen through their interactions. After coming back from India Pri apologizes to her mother about the questions she asked about her father and other things as she says "but I am sorry. For everything. I am so sorry I bothered you about that awful man and that I fought with you" (Chanani 156), which seems to deepen their connection even more.



Despite her strength and resilience, her mother has her own fears, flaws and hopes. She struggles with the pressures of being a single mother and providing for her daughter, which leads to moments of frustration and exhaustion. Throughout the story she undergoes growth and transformation as she tries to confront her own fears and insecurities, and learns to embrace changes and uncertainty because of her daughter. The journeys of the characters are parallel as they both are on a quest of self-discovery trying to tackle their own different problems.

The diasporic element becomes a major factor on how Priyanka perceives her feelings about India not matching her preconceived notions which she formed due to the Pashmina. The overwhelming realisation of how her mother was not wrong when she told her about India, how she should have trusted her and later the acceptance of how the Pashmina misled by trying to depict her desires. Although the journey helped her connect with her roots the diasporic element depicts how hard it is for people to adjust to new places and fit into their surroundings, all to either have a better shot at life or due to unavoidable circumstances.

The trauma she faces results from the reason why she prevents talking about her past and about India altogether. Being unaware of the hardships her mother faced in her past Pri always tries to ask her questions about her father and how life was in India. The trauma instilled in her memory forces her not to visit home or talk to her family. After a sudden call from her sister, Meena the memories are brought back, she finally allows Pri to visit India as she wanted it badly. Her struggle to let go of the past trauma is evident when she tries to protect Pri by not telling her about the ugly truths. She even tries to warn Pri that something seems better from a distance but the reality may not be as beautiful, like India may not be what she expects i.e. a vibrant country with beauty all around. This indeed is proven when Pri lands and sees India which is far different from the visions she visited while wearing the pashmina.

Pashmina offers a poignant portrayal of the adolescent psyche, capturing the complexities of identity, belonging, curiosity and emotional turmoil experienced by Pri and other adolescents universally. Priyanka's initial struggle to fit in at school and her yearning to connect with her Indian roots resonate with many young adults navigating a world that can feel both familiar and foreign. It was found that the narrative encapsulates a beautiful journey about growing up, figuring out who we are, and what it means to come from a different cultural and socio-political background. Through Pri's story Chanani invites us to reflect on our journeys of self-discovery and the universal struggles of adolescence. In doing so, she reminds us the power of storytelling to illuminate the human experience and inspire empathy, understanding and connection. The magical pashmina emerges as a potent symbol of this internal conflict, transporting her to a fantastical vision of India and igniting a spark of curiosity about the land of her heritage. Priyanka, the main character, is both Indian and American, and this hybrid entity makes her feel like she doesn't quite belong anywhere. She wants to learn more about her Indian heritage, but her mom carefully shuns the topic. This search for her roots predominantly occupies the main thread of the narrative. Nimisha, the mother of Priyanka is strong and determined, but she also has a hidden past that causes her pain. She wants to protect Priyanka, but this also keeps them from being closer. Eventually, they learn more about each other's past and feelings, which brings them together. Priyanka's journey isn't just about traveling to India, it's about learning who she is as a person. She faces challenges and doubts, but she also discovers her own strength and finds joy in her family and heritage.

Priyanka's odyssey in *Pashmina* is not merely a quest for roots; it is also a meticulously woven tapestry depicting self-discovery and empowerment against the backdrop of cultural exploration. As she unravels the mysteries of her family's past and embraces the vibrant threads of her Indian heritage, she gains a profound understanding of herself and the world around her. This transformation mirrors the very essence of adolescence, where individuals navigate the labyrinthine corridors of growing up and forge their own unique paths. Pri's initial disconnect from her Indian heritage stems from the fertile ground of her bicultural upbringing. Caught between the two worlds, she grapples with the pressure to conform at school while simultaneously yearning to understand the cultural tapestry that forms her identity. This struggle resonates deeply with many adolescents from immigrant backgrounds who find themselves navigating the complexities of multiple cultural spheres. The magical pashmina becomes a potent metaphor for this yearning. Each time she dons it, she is transported to a vivid and enchanting vision of India, a land both familiar and foreign, igniting a spark of curiosity and a longing for vibrant connection.

However, her journey is far from a smooth ride. The geographical dislocation manifests in her internal and external conflicts. The isolation and loneliness she undergoes fuels her desire to unearth her cultural roots, but this pursuit often leads to strained relations with her mother, Nimisha. Their complex bond reflects the challenges of navigating a mother-daughter relationship amidst the complexities of cultural dislocation and the tumultuous terrain of adolescent psychology. Nimisha emerges as a central character, a source of strength, wisdom, and complexity. She embodies the struggles and triumphs of an immigrant single mother fiercely trying to preserve her heritage while raising a daughter in a new land. Despite her



unwavering commitment to Pri, her past holds deep-seated wounds, hindering her from discussing India or her father. This apprehension arises from the crucible of hardships she faced, including cultural adjustment, language barriers, and the relentless grip of economic challenges. Yet, her resilience shines through her unwavering support and guidance for Pri, a testament to the unwavering love that transcends cultural divides.

The narrative delves into the intricate tapestry of their relationship. While love and understanding form the foundation, the inevitable challenges of adolescence lead to occasional clashes. Despite their differences, they share a deep bond evident in their interactions. As the story progresses, both Pri and Nimisha experience growth and transformation. Pri confronts her insecurities and embraces the winds of change, while Nimisha grapples with her past and learns to confront the phantoms that reside within her. Their journeys become parallel paths of self-discovery, each step leading them closer to a deeper understanding of themselves. The revelation of Nimisha's past trauma sheds light on her reluctance to discuss India. The pain associated with leaving her family and a broken engagement forced her to build a new life in America, shielding Pri from the harsh realities. This struggle to let go of the past creates a barrier between them but ultimately paves the way for Pri's long-awaited trip to India, a pilgrimage to the land woven into the very fabric of her being.

Landing in India shatters Pri's idealized visions conjured by the pashmina. The bustling streets and unfamiliar customs create a stark contrast to the fantastical world she envisioned. This encounter with the "real" India pushes her to confront romanticized notions and embrace the cultural richness in all its complexity. It forces her to shed rose-tinted glasses and appreciate the vibrant tapestry of Indian life, imperfections and all. Throughout her journey, Pri faces the sting of prejudice and discrimination. Her classmates' ignorance and stereotypical views highlight the challenges of navigating multiple identities. These experiences further her sense of alienation, reinforcing the feeling of not fully belonging to either world. However, she doesn't succumb to despair. Instead, she finds solace and strength in her artistic talent, a legacy passed down from her grandmother. This connection to her family's artistic lineage becomes a source of strength and inspiration, a reminder that her heritage is a wellspring of creativity and beauty.

Ultimately, Pri's journey in *Pashmina* is a celebration of self-acceptance and cultural pride. By embracing her dual heritage, she finds a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries. She learns to appreciate the beauty and complexity of both her American and Indian identities, realizing that they are not opposing forces but rather complementary threads that enrich the tapestry of her being. Priyanka's odyssey in *Pashmina* culminates in a powerful message of reconciliation and acceptance. Her quest to bridge the gap between her American upbringing and Indian heritage takes her on a whirlwind journey filled with self-discovery, emotional upheaval, and ultimately, a deeper understanding of her family history. The story leaves us with a sense of hope and empowerment. Priyanka's story reminds us that the adolescent quest for identity is a universal experience, often intensified by cultural complexities. It celebrates the power of family, self-discovery, and embracing one's heritage, no matter how intricate or challenging the journey might be. As Priyanka returns to America, she carries with her a newfound understanding of her family history, a deeper connection to her roots, and the confidence to embrace her unique identity in the world.

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