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Navigating global forces: Multinational Capitalism and Multiculturalism in Manjushree Thapa's *All of Us in Our Own Lives*

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Abstract

Nepali writing in English experienced a surge in popularity after the 1990s, following the establishment of a multi-party system in Nepal. Thapa is one of the prominent Nepali writers who took Nepali English writing to a global audience. Her novel *All of Us in Our Own Lives* (2016) highlights the position and status of Nepali democratic society in a globalized world. As Nepal is exposed to globalisation post-1990s and a large population of the country is migrants, Thapa's novel shows how these individuals deal with their identity in a multicultural world. The book examines the flow of international funds and foreign aid in Nepal. The study will explore the impact of globalization and multiculturalism on Nations and their citizens, addressing the prospects and shortcomings associated with these phenomena

Keywords: Multinational capitalism, multiculturalism, nepali diaspora, globalization

Introduction

Multinational capitalism is the outcome of globalisation, which encompasses the establishment of business cooperations beyond borders, whereas multiculturalism comprises the recognition of all cultures in a society. In today's world of globalisation, huge multinational companies are established in all nooks and corners of the world, and a large segment of people migrate to foreign for their living. It will give rise to multiculturalism, affecting society, culture, and the economy. Nepal has also experienced the impact of globalisation after 1990, which has resulted in its economic liberalization, more inflow and outflow of funds and increased Foreign Direct Investment. Despite its primarily agrarian economy, Nepal has gradually adopted neoliberal policies (Zayed 13). According to the World Investment Report, Foreign Direct Investment in Nepal amounted to 19.2 billion in 2019-20, substantially contributing to Nepal's economy ("World Investment Report 2022"). Nepali writing in English has been gaining popularity since the 1990s, after the establishment of multi-party democracy in Nepal. It fostered an environment of greater political freedom and expression, which encouraged the rise of Nepali writing in English to engage with a broader audience and share diverse cultural narratives, reflecting the country's evolving multicultural identity. Prominent writers like Manjushree Thapa, Samrat Upadhyaya, Greta Rana, Rabi Thapa and others have significantly introduced Nepali society to an international readership. These writers have also recognized the profound impact of multinational capitalism on their country and sought to explore and critique these changes through their writing. For instance, "The Good Shopkeeper" by Samrat Upadhyay illustrates multinational capitalism in Nepal by critiquing displacing traditional roles with computer-educated professionals. The narrative highlights a new class accumulating wealth through private trade, reflecting global capitalist influences (Zayed 19-20).

The novel *All of Us in Our Own Lives* (2016) by Manjushree Thapa has yet to be explored much in existing literature. Sharma's thesis delves into the characters' struggles with identity in contemporary society (186), whereas Shalini's analysis focuses on the characters' diasporic characteristics, such as identity and nostalgia in the novel (113). This current study aims to fill a gap in examining the novel vis-a-vis multiculturalism and impact of globalization on Nepal and Nepalese.

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The text reflects the complexities and tensions arising from Nepal's encounter with globalization and multinational capitalism, as the challenge of multiculturalism today manifests capitalism's global influence, signifying the uniformity of the modern world (Zizek 46). The study will address how select text reflects the impact of globalization and multiculturalism on Nepali society and its citizens, particularly in terms of identity and international aid.

Materials and methods

The research will employ a textual analysis approach to analyze the select text, focusing on literary perspectives. The novel's themes, characters, and narrative structure will be analysed to identify its interpretation of globalization and multiculturalism. It will elucidate how Thapa's novel reflects and critiques the effects of globalization and multiculturalism on Nepali society and its citizens.

A range of relevant secondary sources, including journal articles, monographs, and theses, were consulted to establish a theoretical framework and contextual support. Important references include academic literature on neoliberalism, diasporic identity, and feminist critiques. This research draws on interdisciplinary views from literature, sociology, and globalization studies to build its arguments in a comprehensive way.

Discussion

Thapa's novel highlights the impact of globalisation on South Asians, along with their trials and prospects. In her analysis, Clare explores that the novel presents Nepali society and provides a clear picture of our interconnected world (CBC books 2018). Thapa depicts the struggles of modern Nepali society dealing with cultural identity and economic inequality in the era of globalisation.

Ava, a Nepali child raised by a Canadian couple, epitomizes the blending of diverse cultures. Her experiences as an individual with mixed heritage navigating life and professional environments in Nepal shed light on the personal aspects of multiculturalism and the flexible nature of cultural identity. The financial support for her endeavors comes from international benefactors, highlighting the influence of global capital on local initiatives. The assistance programs under her leadership often align with the priorities set by donor nations, underscoring the prevailing economic power dynamics.

The infiltration of multinational capitalism into Nepali society, as portrayed in Thapa's novel, has the potential to disrupt cultures and identities. Ava has more freedom in life than Nepali women yet faces stigmatization for reasons such as forming an identity in a new area and ethnic belonging in Nepal. C.P. Aryal, in his review, opines that Manjushree's portrayals of political events, rural people's expectations of private agencies, and women's societal barriers are distressing but accurate (196-97).

Ava hesitates to acknowledge her Nepali ancestors once she arrives in Nepal, as one can develop one's own distinct identity without being affected by capitalism or other ideologies. This evolving and resilient identity is flexible and responsive to the world around them (Oliver 53). She tries to make sense of Nepal's labyrinthine aid industry while navigating her way around her strange homeland. However, many things make sense once she leaves the office and visits a rural CBO. She becomes acutely aware of the assistance industry's flaws, waste, and hypocrisy as she

learns that vast amounts of money allocated to the underprivileged and impoverished never actually reach them. Instead, a select few aid workers and government officials benefit financially.

She meets Indira, and the two of them battle to establish themselves in Nepal's patriarchal society, as the Nepali patriarchal system neutralizes the subjugation of women inside the family by perpetuating stereotypes of feminine passivity and conventional heterosexuality for women are rarely considered locations or places for interrogations that challenge masculine ideas (Chamling 159).

Through the character of Ava Berriden, who straddles Western and Nepali cultures, Thapa exemplifies the conflicts and dislocations that arise from globalization. Ava's battle with her mixed heritage underscores the notion that individuals may experience a sense of cultural dislocation or identity turmoil when confronted with the pervasive impact of Western corporate culture.

Multinational capitalism promotes multicultural interactions that can result in cultural exchange and enrichment. Thapa's novel illustrates how international organizations play a crucial role in bringing individuals from different cultural backgrounds together, fostering mutual understanding, and integrating diverse cultural practices. Kymlicka *et al.*, in their work, *Multiculturalism and the Welfare State* (2006). Explore the relationship between multiculturalism and the welfare state in diverse societies, examining how economic globalization and multinational capitalism intersect with cultural diversity and social policy (5). The work culture of Ava and Indira gave them the freedom to travel across the world and they had the opportunity to interact with people from diverse culture.

Thapa's description of Nepali society in connection with multinational capitalism exemplifies the changes witnessed in social dynamics. This metamorphosis can result in various consequences, encompassing favorable and unfavorable aspects. Cultural globalization can strengthen and weaken human connections by spreading cultural knowledge worldwide, requiring a greater understanding of different cultures (Crozet 7). On one side, it may foster heightened individualism and consumerism; on the other, it can facilitate improved global interconnectedness and cultural consciousness.

In Nepal, Ava collaborates with individuals from diverse nations, including the United States, Europe, and Australia, each contributing their unique cultural outlooks and customs. The coworkers in this group exemplify multiculturalism in the professional environment, showcasing how different cultures coexist and influence each other in global development efforts, whether through collaboration or conflict.

In the novel, Thapa mentions NGOs in Nepal, like World Development Systems-Nepal and National Network Nepal, working on healthcare, education, women empowerment, community development, disaster relief, and human rights. These NGOs are shown to be dependent on international aid. This interdependence highlights the impact of multinational capitalism on the formation of reliance patterns, wherein local endeavors are influenced by the accessibility of international financial resources rather than the demands and capabilities of the indigenous population.

There are instances in the novel where the issue of corruption within NGOs is subtly addressed or implied: "To Indira, the entire proposal seemed to be written in red and

highlighted in yellow, signaling its corruption. Vishwa Bista had to get it approved, and swiftly” (Thapa 137). The discrepancy highlights the unequal impacts of worldwide capitalism. Despite the influx of financial resources from multinational development agencies in Nepal, the advantages are not equitably shared, frequently benefiting expatriates and urban elites at the expense of rural communities.

Indira Sharma is a typical character through whom the reader can glimpse a Nepali middle-class woman who has succeeded in her career but is still restricted by society's bigotry about women. She also illustrates the difficulties of being an employed daughter-in-law in an upper-caste Hindu family. When Indira is having a conversation with Ava, she reveals her actual position in the family as she says, “Ava, how many rules I must follow as a daughter-in-law? Like when you came for dinner: can I drink a glass of wine in my own house? And at work-am I equal?” (Thapa 175) Ava's exposure to Nepal made her aware that “women lagged behind men in health, education, income, mobility, opportunity, political representation” (Thapa 76).

Indira's efforts to balance her work with international organizations and her commitment to local customs demonstrate the intersection of multiculturalism and multinational capitalism. In her position, she illustrates the influence of global economic structures while emphasizing the importance of preserving local cultural practices. She travels across the world as “of all the European cities Indira had been to while travelling for work-London and Brussels, Helsinki and Cologne, Copenhagen and, of course, Frankfurt, several times- Paris was the prettiest” (Thapa 7). John, an anthropologist, showcases the essence of multiculturalism as he embarks on his transformative expedition to Nepal, skilfully navigating the intricate path of cultural assimilation and seamlessly integrating into the vibrant tapestry of Nepali society. In Nepal, he focused on researching the indigenous natural resource management systems of the Newars in Bhaktapur for his PhD thesis. During this time, he met his wife, a native Newar of Bhaktapur. After receiving her family's approval, they celebrated their marriage with a traditional Newari ceremony. He loves traditional Nepali dishes like momos (dumplings) and dal bhat (lentil soup with rice), immersing himself in the food habits of his adopted home.

In the text, multinational capitalism intersects with the suffering of the diasporic populace. Suman Rani opines that location, displacement, and relocation can all be investigated in diasporic texts. The shifting definition of home, as well as the attendant anxiety about homelessness and the impossibility of returning, are recurring themes in diasporic literature. (253). Ava is one such character who represents the diasporic populace grappling with the complexities of multinational capitalism. Despite her privileged background, Ava faces challenges navigating her dual identity and the expectations placed upon her in both Western and Nepali societies. Her experiences highlight the marginalization and exploitation faced by diasporic individuals, who may struggle to find belonging and acceptance in either culture. Fucche, a character who died in the host country, is mentioned as “So Many Nepali brothers and sisters suffered at home, and then came here and suffered even more. So many, like Fucche, perished” (Thapa 15).

Surya, another female character, desired to work to assist her parents financially. It led her to leave her home after securing a job in India. Subsequently, she lost contact with her family for several years. Given the alarming trend of Nepali girls being trafficked into India, there were suspicions that Surya might have also been coerced into a brothel in India.

Gyanu informs Kisne that he had previously been employed in Bombay, to which Kisne responds, “he worked as a guard in Bombay, as a waiter in Allahabad, a cleaner in Goa” (Thapa 85). Their dialogue illustrates the necessity that drove them to relocate from one location to another to sustain themselves.

The novel sheds light on the complexities of diasporic experiences in a globalized world, highlighting how economic forces, cultural dynamics, and identity struggles intersect to shape individual lives and narratives. Thapa's writing falls in “the literature on contemporary identities and social change that abounds with terminology and images of radical transition, disorientation, turbulence, confusion, rootlessness, and constant motion” (Kennedy 1).

Findings

The findings suggest that Manjushree Thapa's *All of Us in Our Own Lives* provides a compelling narrative that explores the complex interplay between multinational capitalism and multiculturalism. The novel highlights the potential crises and opportunities arising from this intersection. The texts portray how a developing nation like Nepal struggles with its identity in the age of globalization and neo-liberalization by highlighting the tensions between traditional values and modern economic pressures, illustrating the complexities of cultural and economic integration. Through the character of Ava, Thapa portrays the impact of multinational capitalism on local society. Through the characters of Ava, Indira, Gyanu, and Kisne, the novel explores the socio-economic and cultural aspects of Nepali society. The text portrays Nepal's multicultural society. It also shows how female characters like Indira and Durga struggle with their identity amidst societal obligations, highlighting the subtleties of multiculturalism in the contemporary world.

Conclusion

Thapa's literary work, *All of Us in Our Own Lives* presents a vivid portrayal of contemporary Nepali society, exploring the influence of multinational capitalism and multiculturalism on its people. Through a compelling narrative and the characters' experiences, the novel effectively illustrates how multinational capitalism shapes a multicultural society. It thoroughly examines the impact of globalization in today's world, providing insight into Nepal's socio-economic, political, and cultural landscape and shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that arise from the convergence of multinational capitalism and multiculturalism.

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