



## INTERWOVEN HISTORIES, BORDERLESS FUTURES: DECENTERING CANONS IN GLOBAL LITERARY DIALOGUES

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### Abstract

*This research paper explores the multiple natures of global literary traditions by interrogating the concept of the literary canon, advocating for a decentering philosophy rooted in marginal, indigenous, and feminist voices, and examining the intercultural dialogues that shape contemporary literature. Drawing examples from works by Julie Janson, Jhumpa Lahiri, Alexis Wright, and Anita Nair, the research study analyses how interwoven histories and imagined futures have created transnational narratives that transcend borders. The discussion is fixed in postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and decolonial perspectives, offering insights into the challenges and promises of a truly global literary record.*

### Keywords

*Global Literary Canons, Decentering, Marginal Voices, Transnational Narratives, Postcolonial Theory, Intercultural Dialogue, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

“Plural Pasts, Shared Futures” is both a philosophical attitude and a academic necessity in the twenty-first century. Literary canons, shaped by colonial legacies, global migration, digital transformation, and transnational activism, now stand at a crossroads. The potential of literature to interweave together the disregarded, native, and feminist pasts with universal motifs creates the foundation for borderless, combined futures. The conference theme foregrounded in the university of Western Australia event captures this challenge and opportunity: how can scholars, educators, and creators move beyond the storage tower of nation, language, and region to promote a truly organized global humanity.

Decentering the canon is not merely about presence but about transformation—re-envisioning how literature circulates, the stories that are told, and the ways in which memory, suffering, resistance, and hope are interwoven across cultures.

#### **Research Methodology:**

The present research study adopts a relative and interdisciplinary literary methodology. The textual analysis of selected novels, poems, and essays is accompanied by critical discourse analysis, sketch upon the secondary scholarship from postcolonial, feminist, and native studies. The works are selected based on their personification of plural histories and global futures, benefitting perspectives that encounter recognized canons.

#### **Literature Review:**

The question of the canon has been recurrently examined in literary studies. John Guillory’s “Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation” presents the canon as both a product and propagator of cultural capital, often to the exclusion of minority voices (Guillory 4).



Postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” advocate for the representation of subaltern perspectives and the risks of essentialism (Spivak, 281). Eco-critics including Rob Nixon “Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor” highlight how environmental narratives, often marginalized, must become central to global literary dialogue (Nixon, 2). Feminist scholarship—such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s writing on world feminism—emphasizes interconnectedness while foregrounding difference (Mohanty, 512). Recent studies such as Julie Janson’s activism in literature and Alexis Wright’s representations of Aboriginal Australia provide paradigm-shifting contributions that inform this investigation (Janson, 54; Wright, 209).

### **Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*:**

Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* illuminates the complexities of interwoven histories and the longing for borderless futures through its intricate tapestry of diasporic experience and decentered identity. The novel powerfully challenges established canons by foregrounding immigrant consciousness, shifting cultural coordinates, and global literary dialogues.

Ashima means ‘she who is limitless, without borders.’ Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means ‘he who transcends grief (Lahiri, 26).

This naming itself encodes histories and aspirations that refuse confinement to national or cultural boundaries. Ashima’s journey, and Ashoke’s trauma-surviving resilience, exemplify how personal and historical narratives merge, assembling a transnational self that resists the rigidity of traditional canons.

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts (Lahiri, 49).

Lahiri uses physiological metaphor to highlight the historical connections of migration—unending and generative-crucial for decentering literary canons. Ashima’s status as “foreigner” is unresolved and ongoing, not simply a past condition but a lived historical process.

True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere (Lahiri, 276).

Ashima’s eventual embrace of border lessness subverts canonical notions of belonging, redefining future identities as mobile, plural, and situated in global dialogues. Her narrative arc envisions the possibility to inhabit multiple cultural spaces, challenging the boundaries of national, linguistic, and literary canons.

Do yourself a favor. Before it’s too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late (Lahiri, 16).

This advice, conveyed by Ashoke, is an authoritative towards borderless experience—actively seeking the world beyond forced limits. Gogol’s literal and metaphorical journeys embody the future of identity: flexible, unfixed, and always in dialogue with the global other.

There’s no such thing as a perfect name. I think human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen,” he adds. “Until then, pronouns (Lahiri, 245)



Lahiri's focus on naming as self-determination stands as a critique of literary canon's power to define identity. Gogol's struggle with his names—pet, good, American—breaks open the dialogic possibility for characters and readers to construct hybrid subjectivities, unmoored from singular traditions.

Gogol is old enough to know that there is no Ganguli here. He is old enough to know that he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life.  
(Lahiri, 69)

The refusal of rootedness, of burial, literalizes a borderless future: belonging is not eternally mapped to the canon of place or lineage. Instead, her characters remain perpetually enroute, their histories interwoven and their futures negotiated in borderless spaces of memory and imagination.

### **Analysis of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*:**

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* focusses interwoven histories and imagines borderless futures by bringing together the voices and experiences of six women, each marked by patriarchy and cultural prospects, in the railway coupe. Through its polyphonic narratives and resilience, the novel decentrally positions its female protagonists in dialogue with global literary canons, refusing fixity and defending work.

He was too smitten by his second wife and the sons she produced easily and regularly at eighteen-month intervals to bother too much about a daughter.  
(Nair, 76)

This captures generational gender bias and the inheritance of patriarchal values within family histories. The coupe compartment becomes a microcosm where these histories converge, not as isolated stories, but as shared legacies haunting and shaping each woman's journey toward selfhood.

This is the world. Half of it is lit by the sun and the other half remains in darkness. It is the same with life. There is good and bad and it's our duty to remain in the light, be good (Nair, 14).

This philosophical framing offers self-reflection, urging women to move out of genetic shadows. The coupe's transitional space is both literal and metaphorical, representing sites where histories intertwine and women gain perception through collective storytelling.

Once you stop worrying what the world will think of you, your life will become that much easier to live (Nair, 207).

This assertion signs a break with preventive tradition—a borderless future rooted in self-definition and freedom. Akhila's transformation, encouraged by her fellow passengers' stories, embodies the quest for self-sufficiency that overthrows set limits by patriarchy and canon.

Women are strong. Women can do everything, as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman must search within herself for that vein of strength. It does not manifest by itself (Nair, 162)





The coupe passengers' shared encounters confirm the power of women's unity, foreseeing futures that are borderless by virtue of internal strength and chosen identity, exceeding the stories imposed by cultural canons.

Akhila, if there is one virtue I have, it is immunity to what people think of me. Naturally this makes them dislike me even more. People don't like to think that their opinion of someone means nothing to that person. And when it is a woman . . . the thought is intolerable. But like I said, I don't care (Nair, 193).

Through Akhila's journey towards "immunity," Nair contests societal perceptions and literary traditions that limit female voice and subjectivity. The coupe, transformed from a mere compartment to a space of introspection, allows the women to "decenter" canonical expectations and rewrite their destinies. "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached" (Nair, 236).

Echoing themes of resilience, the author's exact use of spiritual/motivational rhetoric situates her women on a journey not only through physical landscapes but across psychological, historical, and canonical boundaries—supporting lifelong quests for liberation and visibility in global contexts.

The polyphonic tale of *Ladies Coupé*, knitting together diverse backgrounds, allows for voices previously demoted entering global literary dialogue. Nair rights ordinary women's struggles, journeys, and acts of courage, instituting a blueprint for hopeful, borderless, and decentered futures in and beyond Indian literary traditions. In this connection, Gita Viswanath situates *Ladies Coupé* as "a landmark in feminist Indian English fiction, offering intersectional perspectives that critique patriarchal norms" (Viswanath, 63).

The text occupies an important place in Indian English fiction, foregrounding the experiences, voices, and agency of women. The generative contribution of the text to expansive literary conversations by transgressing boundaries – cultural, canonical, and gendered – and providing new orientations towards self and identity. The train coupe serves as a symbolic transitional space of personal and collective histories. It connects the novel to global traditions of travel narratives, such as the *Canterbury Tales* or *Decameron*. Nevertheless, Nair, shifts the focus of the narrative from destination to process, accentuating openness and the fluidity of narrative. The coupe's space enacts a collage of stories that interconnect and transgress boundaries.

Besides, the novel presents a feminist re-appropriation of identity and empowerment. Each woman's experience in the coupe marks a journey of self-determination, defiance of gender limitations imposed by society, and their resistance to social pressures. Their experience promotes a shared desire to express their own voices and subject positions, which situates this novel within international feminist discourse about voice, agency, and the politics of gender. Interweaving histories presents an important central theme as the cooperative brings together stories shaped by caste, class, tradition, and modernity. The creation of the coupe serves as a metaphor to encompass the idea of interwoven histories and how local experiences in India enter into larger global discussions related to identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation. The composite narrative of the novel engages with an international dialogue about hybrid identities.

Finally, *Ladies Coupé* looks toward futures beyond borders through Akhila's evolution and the collection of wisdom among women. The novel embraces and/or enacts fluidity in identity as an act of ongoing transformation, which aligns with global contemporary literature's rejection for definitive endings/identity. It embraces the openness of identity as possibility for a more inclusive and self-determined future across tertiary, literary and social dimensions.

Another notable structural aspect of the novel is its polyphony where voices disrupt, both in form and content, patriarchal sensibilities and literary canons. Through its engagement with a diversity of female stories, the text foregrounds marginal voices and undermines the authority of single stories. This type of polyphonic structure occupies notions of feminist heteroglossia and



global literary pluralism, thus signaling a decentering of literary canons. An interwoven approach to literary history actively counterattacks the uniform canon, instead highlighting dynamic weaving of native, feminist, queer, Dalit, and Adivasi traditions into the global record. Decentering is endorsed through thoughtful attention to disregarded voices, alternative narrative forms, and transnational motifs—migration, exile, ecological predicament, and technological innovation—as crystallized by the conference themes.

The processes of translation, adaptation, and reinterpretation sustain literary and cultural memory while facilitating the circulation of new, borderless stories. Anthologies, awards, and literary festivals play a crucial role in shaping contemporary canons but must also be interrogated for their gatekeeping tendencies and possibilities for inclusive transformation. The impact of digital technologies on storytelling—web novels, digital archives, online literary collaborations—accelerates the movement of diverse voices and reconfigures reader and writer communities worldwide. Yet, the challenge remains for pedagogy and curriculum to incorporate and valorize these plural histories meaningfully.

### Conclusion:

Thus, to sum up the discussion, decentering literary canons is a constant process requiring critical hopefulness, cross-cultural scholarship, and activist translation. Interwoven histories and borderless futures emerge when literature becomes a site for solidarity, creative resistance, and mutual recognition of the world's interwoven pasts. The examples discussed in this study illustrate how global literary dialogues can productively transcend boundaries, engender new ethical imaginaries, and shape more just, inclusive futures.

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