

GLOBAL FLOWS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: ANALYSING SHIVYA NATH'S THE SHOOTING STAR: A GIRL, HER BACKPACK AND THE WORLD THROUGH APPADURAI'S LENS

Rangoli Agarwal¹, Dr Shuchi Agrawal², Dr. Reena³

¹Ph.D scholar, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh.,
Phone number- 8923042436

²Professor, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh,
Phone number- 9999038606

³Professor, Kurukshetra University, Haryana

rangoliagarwal28@gmail.com¹

sagarwal2@amity.edu²

reenaenglishgc@gmail.com³

Abstract

In the current research paper, the travel memoir *The Shooting Star: A Girl, Her Backpack and the World* by Shivya Nath (2018) is analysed through the prism of the theory of globalization by Arjun Appadurai. It examines how multinational capitalism has affected cultural and individual identities. Appadurai's concept of scapes consists of five scapes- ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. This framework aids us in examining cultural flows of the world that affect the story of Nath. In her account of travelling in Guatemala, Jordan, Costa Rica, Turkey, and South Africa, Nath stresses the relations between local traditions and influences from the world. The forces these influences normally involve multinational companies and global capital. In her memoir, Nath interacts with mediascapes through digital storytelling. She connects her experiences to a broader audience and contributes to the global understanding of various cultures. The effects of financescapes and technoscapes are evident in her ability to travel and share her journey, aided by the global movement of money and technology. Her interactions with different ideas during her trips show how ideoscapes affect her personal growth and perspective. By using Appadurai's globalization theory, this paper argues that *The Shooting Star: A Girl, Her Backpack and the World* (2018) illustrates the negotiation of cultural identity within the framework of multinational capitalism. It provides insights into the complex relationships between globalization, media, and identity in modern travel literature.

Keywords: Culture, Identities, Multinational Capitalism, Globalisation, Travel

Introduction

“The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (Appadurai32). Arjun Appadurai's theory of scapes provides a detailed way to understand the complexities of globalization and its effects on cultural identities. Appadurai, a well-known anthropologist, introduced the idea of scapes in his important work *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* to explain the various flows and exchanges that shape the global landscape “Appadurai proceeds to offer a new vocabulary that helps us to understand the ‘new global cultural economy,’ itself a product of ‘disorganized capitalism’ and a complex of ‘fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics’” (Powell and Steel 75).

His framework includes five dimensions: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. Each represents a different form of global cultural flow. Ethnoscapes refer to the movement of people across borders. This includes immigrants, refugees, tourists, and other groups. This movement affects cultural interactions and blends identities. Technoscapes involve the global setup of technology and its role in shaping cultural experiences and exchanges. Financescapes show the flow of capital across the world, emphasizing the economic side of globalization and its impact on cultural dynamics.

Mediascapes and ideoscapes provide important insights into the roles of media and ideas in shaping cultural identities. Mediascapes refer to the distribution of electronic tools to produce and share information. This includes the images and stories spread through various media channels. These media portrayals significantly impact how cultures view themselves and others, influencing collective identities and worldviews. Ideoscapes, on the other hand, deal with the flow of ideologies and political narratives. This includes ideas about freedom, rights, sovereignty, and democracy. These ideologies spread globally, often interacting with local beliefs and practices. This leads to the creation of hybrid cultural identities.

The discussion on globalization and cultural identity provides important insights for analyzing *The Shooting Star*. Stuart Hall questions the idea of identity as something fixed. He states that “cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (Hall 225). This highlights identity as both rooted and changeable. This tension is evident in Nath’s evolving self as she moves through various cultural spaces. Going further, Hall explains that identity is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (Hall 225). This directly relates to the dual movement seen in global narratives like Nath’s. In *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, Debbie Lisle argues that travelogues serve as “crucial sites in which the politics of globalization are negotiated and reproduced” (Lisle 3). This view positions Nath’s memoir as more than a personal journey; it actively engages with global power dynamics and cultural exchange.

Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity” captures the instability of late modern life: individuals must “construct and maintain their identity on their own,” a task that is never complete and therefore marked by uncertainty (Bauman 31). This aligns with Nath’s disconnection from corporate life and shift toward a nomadic, digitally influenced identity. Ulf Hannerz discusses the media’s cross-border role, asserting that “media are now major institutions of contemporary culture, and also major channels of cultural flow across boundaries” (Hannerz 6). This frames Nath’s blog and digital presence as important ways to build and share her narrated identity. Edward Said’s critique is also essential. In *Orientalism*, he argues the West portrays the East as “a passive object of study, always spoken for” (Said 109). Nath’s Indian viewpoint on the Global South flips that dynamic. She speaks from her own experience, rather than being spoken for.

In Shivya Nath’s travel memoir *The Shooting Star*, Appadurai’s ideas about mediascapes and ideoscapes offer a helpful way to examine how globalization connects with cultural identity. Nath’s stories, shaped by her travel and interactions with different cultures, show the changing and diverse nature of cultural identities in today’s global world. This paper will look at her memoir through the lens of mediascapes and ideoscapes to reveal how globalization changes and redefines cultural identities. Shivya Nath’s travel memoir combines her experiences in different countries outside Asia. These experiences reshape who she is. The tools Nath uses to make her travels possible connect with Appadurai’s idea of scapes. She journeys across various places like the deserts of Jordan to the rainforests of Costa Rica. These journeys create a rich mix of experiences, showcasing the complexities of globalization.

Another important aspect of investigating globalization through travel literature is the growing connection between cultural identity and governance. The mobility of the globe was

concentrated in movement of elites or colonial interactions. However now it is now influenced by policies of governments, cities and local councils. These entities determine how cultures are presented, protected, and commercialized. This shift marks a change in

travel writing, evolving from straightforward personal stories to cultural texts that represent institutional frameworks. As scholars of globalization argue, flows of people and ideas are never entirely free but conditioned by the rules, incentives, and boundaries established by administrative structures (Hall 1990; Lisle 2006). For example, tourism boards in Asia, Africa, and Latin America often reframe traditional practices into global attractions, raising questions about authenticity, commodification, and cultural sustainability.

Types of Scapes

While travelling, Shivya Nath encounters several different cultures across different nations, which ultimately broaden her perspective influence her ideologies. As she states, “No longer a fleeting crush on a gorgeous place, travelling became an attempt to forge deeper relationships- with a place, its people, and its food- and make ourselves at home anywhere in the world, irrespective of our upbringing, colour, language, and aspirations (Nath99). Nath’s willingness to dive in the exploration of different cultures can be seen in light of Appadurai’s idea in his book- “Byethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (Appadurai33).

When there is a movement in scapes, they change. When people move, ethnoscaapes change and this change, according to Appadurai, leads to transnational identities. Further, Nath also utilises technology to leverage her worldview and vice-versa. “The global travel blogging had changed significantly in the past two years, opening up revenue streams that didn’t exist before. With an early mover advantage in India, I had been able to capitalize on it, learning the tricks of the changing trade at travel blogging conferences abroad” (Nath56). According to Appadurai, the flow of technology across borders brings “increasingly complex relationships between money flows, political possibilities and the availability of both un- and highly skilled labor” (Appadurai 34) When Nath travels, she explores the culture of nations outside borders of Asia. While staying with a Tesucun family, she encounters the immense hospitality while hosting her as a guest. When Nath tried to help the little girl Elise with cleaning dishes, she got reluctance from her, “I won’t forget how she stopped her work one time, looked up ruefully and stated: *people think our culture is dead. But this is our culture- we treat everyone as our own*” (Nath 63). When she travelled to Costa Rica, she was struck by the country's commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation. She observes, It was in my extensive research about Costa Rica and its *puravida*- living in harmony with nature – philosophy that I stumbled upon the country’s last indigenous cacao growers. During the Spanish inquisition, the Bribris had felt that their native culture and language were condescendingly dismissed, and a proud tribe, they strived to keep their organic, matrilineal way of life alive against all odds. (Nath119)

Moreover, when she travelled within her own country, she embraced certain cultural practices that profoundly influenced her, and she decided to incorporate these practices into her travels abroad. “Gradually, I began to experiment with this novel way of travelling in India-meaningful, more immersed in the local life, mindful of my impact on the ecology- on my travels outside the country” (Nath 54). This interaction with local ideologies on environmentalism highlights how global ideoscapes intersect with and influence individual identities and beliefs. Financescapes, another of Appadurai’s scapes, pertain to the global flow

of capital and its impact on cultural dynamics. In *The Shooting Star*, Nath's ability to travel extensively and sustain her lifestyle is intricately linked to the global financial systems that facilitate mobility and tourism.

The memoir by Nath brings to light the fact that financial resources can help her go through with traveling. That she ceased to be a regular worker of a company, living in Delhi, and that now she is a full-time travel blogger who earns her living by travelling itself, is associated a living wherever I am" (Nath 106).

However, the digital media landscape is not just a neutral space for self-expression; it is shaped by algorithms, corporate sponsorships, and branding needs. Nath's work with eco-tourism projects shows how cultural storytelling connects with digital marketing. Her memoir highlights how the style of travel writing is increasingly linked to promotional messages, even as it tries to emphasize authenticity and experience. At the same time, the interactive nature of digital platforms lets travelers from the Global South share their voices in global discussions, challenging the dominance of Euro-American stories.

Appadurai suggests that these flows are not linear or systematic in their flow. Instead, they overlap and substitute each other, as is also the case in Shivya Nath's memoir, *The Shooting Star*. "Appadurai emphasizes the chaotic nature of these flows and argues that they supersede standard geographical thinking in social-cultural analysis" (Heyman and Campbell 132). At the same time, Appadurai suggests that we do not need to necessarily worry about the idea of homogenization resulting from the flow of scapes. The reason of this is that countries won't necessarily result in losing their cultural identities to the West, they may instead mingle up their cultures with neighbouring countries. There will be multiple imagined worlds in that sense. Moreover, homogenization would also be hindered by the power of indigenization. The host country is likely to affect the foreign culture in its own favour as well. As Appadurai says- "What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies, they tend to become indigenized in one or another way" (Appadurai 32). Instead of culture being uni-directional and homogenizing (where American culture spreads out and influences everyone), it is multi-directional.

While Nath's travel memoir mainly presents a personal account of cultural encounters, it also shows how local communities and government structures respond to globalization. For instance, her thoughts on Costa Rica's commitment to sustainability connect closely to the country's strong focus on environmental governance at the municipal level. Travel literature like Nath's goes beyond individual stories. It offers informal records of how local governance practices influence and manage global tourism.

In the same way, Nath's interactions with indigenous communities in Central America highlight the role of local councils and community groups in preserving cultural heritage. Her observation that these groups work to maintain traditions despite economic and social pressures reflects the negotiations happening within local self-government. These experiences suggest that travel writing, often seen as just personal stories, can provide important insights into how municipalities and community structures shape the interaction between global cultural influences and local identity. On the same lines, Nath asserts towards the end of her memoir after exploring several cultures-

During my drunken trance that day, it struck me that even though I had spent the previous six years attempting to challenge the conventional way of life, perhaps what I had really done was rediscover the ancient wisdom of our species, and of my own people across India. My journey feels as much about a new, alternative way of living as it does about delving deeper into the roots of our past. (Nath 196)

Local Governments and Global Flows

While Nath's travel memoir highlights her interactions with various communities, a closer look shows the often-overlooked influence of local governance on these experiences. Travel does not happen in isolation; it is shaped by city rules, tourism policies, and community projects that address the tensions between globalization and cultural preservation. Appadurai's scapes become clear at this local level, where flows of people, money, and ideas are actively managed by local governments working to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental sustainability. Costa Rica is a strong example in Nath's story. She respects the country's *puravida* philosophy and its commitment to sustainability: "It was in my extensive travel research about Costa Rica and its *puravida*- living in harmony with nature- philosophy that I stumbled upon the country's last indigenous cacao growers" (Nath 119). This respect connects closely to the national and local governance systems. Local councils and tourism boards have included environmental protection in their development plans. They develop regulations that conserve biodiversity besides marketing Costa Rica as an ecological destination. The experience of Nath with the Bribri cacao growers is not entirely a cultural experience. It is a product of government-sponsored programs that safeguard the rights of the indigenous and provide encouragement to community-based tourism. Through this, environmentalism turns into a reality of governance systems that influence the experience of the traveler. The local governments are also moving to utilize these media through the initiation of Instagram campaigns, YouTube advertisements, and interactive websites, which paint areas as the best places to visit. The memoir by Nath therefore constitutes a two-fold movement: on one hand, it is the narrative of a personal experience of a cultural encounter of a person; on the other hand, it is also the reflection of the bigger digital systems in which people consume and share the experience of tourism. In Nath's observations of the indigenous communities in Central America, there is also the reflection of the ways local organizations, commonly collaborating with the municipal authorities, cope with the tensions between global tourism and cultural preservation. Her interviews with Tesucun families reveal that there is more to the local government than bureaucratic bodies. It has community councils and cooperatives. These buildings aid in preserving cultural self-sufficiency, despite their interlinking with worldwide budgets that come with tourism. The local governments are significant in negotiating the global and local influences. They strive to maintain the cultural heritage and make use of economic opportunities.

The Indian context highlights this intersection. Nath changing his traveling habits towards more conscious and environmentally friendly also goes in line with the state-level initiatives, such as the Kerala campaign of the Gods Own Country, as well as the Rajasthan heritage conservation tactics. These campaigns are reminiscent of the mediascapes of Appadurai in the sense that they show how the regional governments shape cultural identity to the international audiences. It is these stories as interpreted by travelers like Nath, which are branded around landscapes and communities depending on the local governments that are made up of them. Her memoir is a kind of unintentional record of how government policy invades the domestic sphere of travel writing where it is not explicitly referred to. Secondly, Nath takes advantage of the digital travel technoscapes, which are also mediated by the local governance.

The municipal and state-level policy moderates a number of travel-related details, including access to e-visas, short-term rental regulation, and the infrastructure to accommodate digital nomads. These forms of governance dictate how Nath can blog in the villages or how she can survive by collaborating with the eco-tourism business. Local authorities, therefore, influence

not only the physical accessibility of locations, but also influence the appearance of these locations in the global mediascape, digitally.

Conclusion

Viewed in this perspective, such travel memoirs as *The Shooting Star* have two functions. They narrate the intimate lives of identification and migration. Secondly, they tend to give non-academic descriptions of the practice of governance. In recording cultural encounters, Nath indirectly shows how local governments govern and control such encounters. The memoir by her reveals how the local and regional governments can silently affect world interactions precisely in agreement with Scapes' theory of Appadurai. It puts into focus the intersection of personal identity, cultural heritage, and multinational capitalism. *The Shooting Star* by Shivya Nath aims at outlining the relationship between globalization and cultural identity, which is even more important when reading it in comparison with other travel authors. *The Shooting Star* by Shivya Nath provides quite a different opinion as compared to Western memoirs like *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert or *The Global Soul* by Pico Iyer. Gilbert and Iyer tend to write as travelers who are quite privileged, either in the West or a section of the diaspora, and interact with other cultures through the prism of mobility, which is made possible by global wealth and networks. On the other hand, Nath depicts a woman of the Global South who has to maneuver financial and technological systems to become capable of obtaining her mobility.

In comparison with the other Indian authors like Anuradha Goyal and Lakshmi Sharath, the memoir by Nath is distinguished by the self-discovery in terms of identity. The main aspects of destinations, itineraries, and cultural tips are present in most of the Indian travel bloggers. Rather, Nath places her experiences within a contemplative structure that analyzes the way experiences change her perspective. It creates a new genre which is a hybrid of a travel diary and an emotional tinting of a memoir. Further, in contrast to earlier authors of Indian travel, such as Rahul Sankrityayan or Pico Iyer, Nath is engaging in the direct discussion of gender issues. Her travels reveal the weaknesses and the independence of a single female traveller. Through this, the work of Nath asserts and transforms the traditions of Indian travel writings. It demonstrates the role of the voices of the Global South in influencing the world literary discourse, which has been dominated by Euro-American narratives. Each of these scapes connects to her experiences. Ethnoscapes are evident in her experience with tourists, migrants, and indigenous folk. Her finances determine her capability to sponsor her travel and cooperate. Her blogs and social media presence are reflected in technoscapes by the digital tools that she uses to blog. Mediascapes render her more noticeable to the world, and expose her to branding pressures and algorithms. Ideoscapes reflect her curiosity about the sustainability dialogue, cultural conservation, and alternative ways of living. The narrative of Nath concurrently emerges with the contribution of local governance in the global movement. accounts of eco-tourism in Costa Rica and community hospitality in Central America can demonstrate the mechanisms that oversee international tourism. Municipalities and councils act as unseen but influential players. They transform international concepts of sustainability and conservation of the heritage into tangible policies that influence the experience of tourists visiting such locations. In India, Nath's focus on mindful and immersive travel connects with state-led branding efforts that present regional identities to global audiences. The memoir is not only a reflection as a person, but it can also be considered as an informal document of the influence of governance on the real practice of globalization.

This is demonstrated when Nath is put in the same category as Western authors such as Gilbert and Iyer, and there is a lot of imbalance in global mobility. Nath has visa problems, money problems, and culture problems. The globalization inequalities are shown in her experiences. Meanwhile, she constructs an online persona, demonstrating how individuals can reassert themselves in these networks. By doing so, *The Shooting Star* adds diversity to the literature on travelling but also brings into focus the views of the Global South, particularly with the voice of a single female traveller grappling with patriarchy and geopolitics. The connections among multinational capitalism, local governments, and cultural identity have been captured in the memoir by Nath. It underlines the fact that globalization is not a homogeneous process. It is influenced by politics, privilege, and power. Through her personal narration of her experiences in connection with the theories of Appadurai, the story of Nath indicates how travel writing can renegotiate cultural identities, record local governance, and unravel global imbalances. Such works act as a reminder to scholars and policymakers that the state of cultural identity in the global age is a dynamic one. It is going through a continuous cycle of personal trips and common rules.

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