

**SYSTEMS THEORY AND LITERARY ANALYSIS:
THE SECOND-GENERATION INDO-AMERICAN FICTION OF
JHUMPA LAHIRI, RISHI REDDI AND
SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN**

by

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Submitted

In fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

to the



Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

July 2011

CERTIFICATE

I am satisfied that the thesis entitled “Systems Theory and Literary Analysis: The Second-Generation Indo-American Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rishi Reddi and Shauna Singh Baldwin” being submitted by Malvika Gupta to the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bonafide research carried out by her under my guidance and supervision. This thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma. I certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.

July 27, 2011

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Acknowledgements

I deeply thank Professor Rukmini Bhaya Nair, my research supervisor, for her graceful and insightful guidance, her support and encouragement throughout. Her willingness to allow me to pursue new ideas and paths in the writing of this thesis is deeply appreciated and acknowledged here. Her helpful suggestions at 'just the right times' made working on and writing this thesis, fulfilling and rewarding.

My deepest thanks to revered Professor P.S. Satsangi, Founder President of the Systems Society of India, former Professor, Head, Dean, IIT-Delhi (Electrical Engineering) and presently Chairman, Advisory Committee on Education, Dayalbagh Educational Institutions, Dayalbagh, Agra. His esteemed and intuitive guidance, encouragement and firm support provided the necessary impetus towards progressing on the new path of interconnecting systems theory to the study of English literature.

I thank:

The Systems Society of India for inviting me to present papers and give invited talks and lectures at various seminars and symposiums.

Mom and Dad for their support, encouragement and strong faith in this thesis throughout.

Sanjay, for sending over and bringing books I needed and couldn't find here.

My mother-in-law and father-in-law for their enthusiasm and encouragement.

All those who were parts of the various stages of my journey of learning, research and writing.

Preeti and Prem, who so generously allowed me to complete my research and writing whenever I needed and asked many curious and probing questions which often proved to be helpful mental stimuli.

And, most importantly, deepest thanks to Pankaj, with whom intellectual discussions and exchanges, external and internal support, gentle encouragement and firm motivation made completing this thesis a reality.

(Malvika Gupta)

Abstract

This thesis applies systems theory to the analysis of literature. The authors whose works are studied via this method are all contemporary second-generation Indo-American women writers. The particular literary texts chosen for analysis are Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston, and Beyond*, *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*; Rishi Reddi's *Karma and Other Stories*; Shauna Singh Baldwin's *English Lessons and Other Stories* and *We are not in Pakistan*. The literary theorists who employ systems theory in their work and whose approach was, broadly speaking, adopted in this thesis are Franco Moretti, Piotr Sadowski and Pascale Casanova. The main works consulted in this regard are Moretti's *Graphs Maps Trees*, Sadowski's *Systems Theory as an Approach to the Study of Literature: Origins and Functions of Literature* and Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*.

In the five chapters of the thesis, I first introduce systems theory as a new approach to literary analysis and then explain how systems theory which seems to offer a holistic approach to the study of a 'system' may be illuminatingly employed in the study of literature. The second chapter dwells on the practicalities of how systems theory may be employed to literary texts taking into account the theoretical perspectives and findings of Sadowski, Moretti and Casanova. In the third chapter, from Sadowski's nine interactions presented in the second chapter, the interactions of environment, author and text are highlighted as being important and thus examined for each of the three writers and their texts under study in the present thesis. In the fourth chapter, the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rishi Reddi and Shauna Singh Baldwin are closely read, extending the systems approach to the highlighting of emergent 'character types' and their interlinkages in the works of these three writers.

Finally, the fifth chapter of the thesis, the Conclusion, shows how the process of ‘distant reading’ as a technique, when combined with the classical method of the ‘close reading’ attempted in the fourth chapter, yields a larger literary system of interconnected character types in second-generation Indo-American/Canadian fiction. This system is presented and constructed in this thesis through a series of visual maps and tables, revealing new connections that were hitherto invisible. The thesis thus concludes with the discovery that there is an ‘emergent property’ of interconnected character types which is revealed when these three individual writers’ works are read as belonging to one literary system.

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