

Exploring Cultural Identity and Nostalgia in South Asian Diasporic Literature

N Veera Basavaraju^{1*}, Dr. Navjeet Kaur²

1 Research Scholar, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

veerabasava48@gmail.com

2 Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

Abstract : The intricate relationship between cultural identity, nostalgia, and diasporic awareness in South Asian diasporic literature is examined in this essay. It looks at how authors express the cultural, psychological, and emotional compromises people make while juggling their lives in their native country and their new one. The study emphasizes issues like memory, displacement, hybridity, belonging, and generational identity transitions via in-depth readings of chosen literary works. The research highlights how nostalgia may be used to both reimagine cultural continuity in diasporic areas and act as a connection to the past. The study also explores how intergenerational tales, language, food, and rituals become symbolic markers of identity development. The research highlights how South Asian diasporic authors describe identity as flexible, adaptable, and always changing, challenging fixed cultural borders by emphasizing the dynamic nature of cultural identity development. In the end, this study advances our knowledge of how diasporic literature serves as a forum for resolving fractured histories and reaffirming cultural rootedness in cross-border settings.

Keywords: South Asian diaspora, cultural identity, nostalgia, hybridity, memory, displacement, transnationalism, belonging, diasporic consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

We are one with the earth now, Mama. If we are no longer bound to any particular plot of land, then we really are one with the earth, isn't that obvious to you? That space, wherever we may be, is ours just as much as any other, she writes in her choral, polyphonic book, *TJie Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. By rejecting the notion of a physical ancestral home and a feeling of simple, unconditional belonging, Maxine Hong Kingston asserts both mental and physical space in the United States. Through her biography of her upbringing as a Chinese-American girl, she tells us a narrative of returning home while writing herself in the United States. The concept of homecoming in her narrative is not the same as the typical return of the first diaspora; rather, it is a charting of her journey and an understanding of how her ethnicity and culture profoundly shape her identity and position in multicultural America. She criticizes conventional diasporic relationships and advocates for a cosmopolitan sensibility that goes beyond national borders and geographical limitations, while also questioning the concept of pure nostalgia and a full homecoming. She anticipates the diasporic fixation with

transnationalism and deterritorialization that began after 1980 by identifying with the earth and asserting her connection to it via the use of the words "home" and "belonging." In her 1993 article "On the Edge of Empire: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora," Aihwa Ong discusses the Chinese diasporic subject who is "deterritorialized in relation to a particular country but is highly localized in relation to family" (Ong 771-72). Kingston, in her diasporic position, can assert the ability to adapt, the strength to survive, "discrepant cosmopolitanism," and "stubborn visions of renewal" in the midst of oppression, marginalization, loss, and suffering (Clifford, "Diaspora", 312).

Some have dubbed the era of dispersion that began in the latter part of the 21st century. Transnational, national, and even regional migration is at an all-time high. The terrain of our imagined communities has been transformed by new social and cultural activities, the creation of new subjectivities, and the unparalleled global movement of ideas, media, technology, and money. The remark by Maxine Hong Kingston, which was given at the beginning of this introduction, offers a broad framework for considering issues of location, belonging, and identity in the context of a world where many displacements are ongoing processes. This dissertation examines nations through the lens of diasporic bodies. This research endeavors to examine the ways in which South Asian Americans residing in Western urban areas are shaped by the politics of diaspora in their migration narratives. Examines how South Asian American individuals are classified and placed inside the hyphen that denotes their identity and the connection between their ancestral home and their current home(s).

Belonging in diaspora is the key premise of this dissertation. Geographical nationalism, which holds that individuals must appropriately belong to a specific, clearly visible location on the global globe, is vehemently opposed in the writings of several diaspora authors, I contend. The works we looked at strongly reject the concept that there is a fixed place to which someone can ever really belong and instead promote the idea of a life marked by constant migration, shifting perspectives, and linguistic and geographical hopping. An exile and a nostalgic homecoming make up the two ends of a linear diaspora narrative, which these authors argue is flawed. Both the tumultuous departure and the equally complicated metropole dwelling are something that they are aware of. The authors exemplify the concept of a homing urge, which is different from wanting to return to one's home country in an absolute or final sense. The idea that the diaspora is built through displacement and supported by the "incommensurable simultaneity" (Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations* 175) of now and there helps me

understand how it can be used to critique gender-based essentialist ideas of national citizens and diasporic subjects, as well as discourses about fixed origins.

Gendered citizenship and the construction of ethnicized, racialized, national, and diasporic subjectivities are also explored in this dissertation's analysis of South Asian American diasporic literary tales. A multi-perspective investigation of diasporic discourses on nationhood, ethnicity, culture, and modernity is developed via in-depth literary readings of five works by South Asian Americans. Writers of Pakistani American descent have been chosen. Authors Sorayya Khan and Sara Suleri are of Indian American descent. Alexander Meena. The Desai brothers, Anita and Kiran. The notion of modernity and its extreme disjunction may indicate the mobility of people across states and countries and symbolize the chaos of cultural reproduction. I propose to examine this by analyzing the intricate link of global modernity on the construction of diasporic identities. Understanding the formation, positioning, and representation of South Asian American diaspora identities in social and literary spaces is crucial for making sense of the cultural displacement and broken character of modernity. A major organizational principle that mediates the notion of diasporic identity is the idea of "belonging." Since "belonging in diaspora" may imply both "a longing to belong" and "longing to be," the title (Be)Joiiging uses parentheses to denote this complexity. Aspirations of national, communal, cultural, and familial belonging are complex, contentious, conflicting, speculative, and situational identities. Asserting one's subjectivity or claim to autonomous subjectivity and selfhood are inherently ambiguous and severely broken processes; the concept of desiring to be is another method of doing either.

It is from the idea of difference and how ideas of difference in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality both create and sustain certain forms of unbelievability that the concept of belonging draws its power. Belonging is examined via the lens of gender in this analysis. This difference is significant because diasporic men and women face patriarchal control patterns and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms differently, as well as various ways of experiencing belonging. Does diasporic experience strengthen or weaken patriarchal control? This is one of the problems raised by a gendered study of diaspora. Is the diaspora a place where gender norms from back home are reinforced? Is it via diasporic transactions and agreements that women create new subject positions and roles? Do women reject down the chance to return if males set the conditions? Women in diaspora, as pointed out by Clifford, often hold on to their "home culture" while also being skeptical, as Maxine Hong Kingston does, of the diasporic demand for genuine ethnicity. If women in diaspora achieve financial,

social, and personal autonomy, the space will be liberating; if they continue to face old patriarchal systems of control, it will be oppressive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sarwal, Amit. (2017). Using the South Asian diaspora in Australia as a case study, this book examines the poetic and metaphysical ideas of "rooting into a culture" and "routing out of a culture'. Characteristic of many diasporic tales is the presence of fractured and dislocated identities that occupy a liminal area, straddling several cultures and histories. Still, "home" is a useful point of reference because of the imaginative, nostalgic, and creative processes that sustain it. In order to differentiate between the many forms of "dislocation" that immigrants experience, the author contends that a more precise understanding of politics of location is necessary. This book examines and draws from a diverse array of works on this subject from literary studies, anthropology, sociology, culture, and history to fill a gap in South Asian diaspora studies, which has mostly ignored the diaspora in Australia.

John, Mariam. (2020). In his essay "Experience," Emerson proposes the concept of a cosmic relationship between humans and the cosmos. Because it is spatial and not an absolute thing, what we take to be true is different from reality. The cosmos and its surroundings are, nevertheless, created by life, which includes everything from subatomic particles to plants, animals, and people. A person's whole spatio-temporal logic is contained in their universe. So, we want to comprehend and make sense of our surroundings, from the mist to man-made objects.

Wahab (2022) This essay examines displacement through the lens of three South Asian communities: the Rohingya of Bangladesh, the Tamils of Sri Lanka in India, and the Afghans in Pakistan. The intricacies of humanitarianism and geopolitics give rise to refugee management in each of these instances, which in turn becomes fundamental to urban concerns about the right to relocate and stay in the city. Our argument is based on research in refugee studies, South Asia studies, and the geopolitics of migrant (im)mobilities. We contend that displacement poses a danger to the definitions of belonging and citizenship in South Asian nations. Because of this, the displaced people's homes have become hotspots for national alienation and governmental brutality due to the complex web of securitization and urbanization. Specifically, we discuss how displaced people are geographically and socioeconomically segregated, making them vulnerable to everyday bureaucratic violence, and how social class influences how displaced people deal with the exclusions that result from

relocation. The state uses spatial control tactics to nationalize urban territory and keep refugees as permanently displaceable, while the displaced influence the urban economy in the places where they reside.

Tiwari, Sandhya. (2011). Nowadays, the word "diaspora" is used to describe almost any group of people who are viewed as "deterritorialized" or "transnational." This means that their social, economic, and political networks go beyond national borders or even the entire world. The Greek root diaspeir means "to distribute" or "to sow to scatter" like seeds, and the prefix dia- means "from one end to the other." This is whence the English term "diaspora" comes from. Naturally, the phrase developed to mean a scattered group with a shared religious and cultural history, and this was especially true in relation to the Jewish historical experience. The "shrinking" borders are leading to an increase in the frequency, size, and self-awareness of these communities. Quite a few are stepping up to the plate, or have done so for quite some time, to shape national narratives, regional alliances, and global political economies.

Ranasinha, Ruvani. (2016). Feminists Kiran Desai, Tahmima Anam, Monica Ali, Kamila Shamsie, and Jhumpa Lahiri are part of a new wave of South Asian women writers writing in English as a second language, and this book is the first to compare and contrast their work. It traces the evolution of postcolonial and modern women's literature from the late 90s and the major shifts that these authors have wrought. Focusing on the writers' varied subcontinental origins (including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), this research challenges the primacy of literature set in India. It takes a different approach than most by looking at the ways in which transnational feminist writers create a postcolonial feminist discourse that is distinct from Anglo-American feminism and how these texts, written by women from different parts of the world, challenge national assumptions.

Chowdhory (2022) From what I can tell, the "indivisible remainder" of a refugee's daily existence is dispossession. Forced migration is a direct result of the material denial of their rights as citizens of the state, which in turn leads people to experience deprivation. Through its provision of protection, the prejudiced global protection system for refugees unwittingly prolongs their plight while robbing them of their dignity. This paper delves deeply into the tangible loss of rights experienced by refugees and discusses the loss of dignity from a normative and philosophical perspective.

Objectives of the Study

1. To use Freud's theory of post-traumatic stress to Sorayya Khan's Noor in order to examine the ways in which trauma impacts cultural identity and nostalgia.
2. To look at how symbolic paintings and flashbacks impact the story and how the characters' emotional yearning for home is portrayed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on Freud's criticism of PTSD, this dissertation is usually qualitative. Freud made a clear distinction between anxiety, fear, and fright. He also proved that trauma is a form of fright that occurs in reaction to a threat, that knowing something causes an embryonic anxiety state and automatic anxiety, and that experiences that are endured without the necessary distress are unmanageable and can resurface in traumatic dreams and impositions. Based on the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, this is a critique or assessment of Sorayya Khan's book Noor. She explores in this book how traumatic character disorder impacts the characters' mental health. The terrible impacts were shown via Noor's paintings portraying war scenes; she is Sajida's atypical daughter. In Noor's crayon drawings, Sajida's father's fishing boat crashes into the sand dunes, and fishing lines swim and bend before Noor's watchful gaze. Khan uses flashbacks in his storytelling. Ali built a house for his family that mirrors Nanijan's critique of human mysteries; the lavatory faces away from Margalla Hill, and the iron bars that enclose the window that looks out over the mountain obscure its view. Hills are attractive on Nanijan Mountain, but Ali thinks of them as symbols of conflict.

Textual Analysis

The negative aspects of war cannot be debated. As far as humankind is concerned, it is the worst possible outcome. It leaves a path of destruction and death, as well as butchery and disease, poverty and ruins. An examination of world history, even at its most fundamental level, reveals that war has been a constant feature of national narratives. Global combat has always left its mark, leaving no era unmarred by its devastation. Although several battlefield engagements occurred, this essay will concentrate on the Pakistani civil war and its effects on the nation. The civil war that divided Pakistan into East Pakistan and West Pakistan began on March 25, 1971. On December 3, 1971, India invaded East Pakistan, starting a period of warfare. As a result of a military coup, West Pakistan ceded power to East Pakistan on December 16, 1971. A newly formed nation on the global map is known as Bangladesh.

Approximately 3 million people died, 10 million were displaced, and 200,000 women were sexually abused throughout this battle. “War does not determine who is right; it only determines who is left.” (Russell, paraphrased) Wars are wars, and they destroy civilization. The environmental, social, and economic domains are not immune to the catastrophic impacts of conflict. War also has other major components, such as the psychological damage it causes and the loss of human lives. In the wake of tensions stemming from linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, Bangladesh became the first postcolonial country to declare independence. The official Pakistani narrative was that Muslims in Bengal were too closely associated with Hindus to be considered adequately clean. What this means is that we need to get rid of Hinduism and immoral Muslims. Pakistani aggression against Bengal is rationalized by this view of the region as a non-Muslim or non-Hindu other. The East Pakistanis were painted as something other than Muslims and Pakistanis.

This representation was based on the assumption that Muslim Bengalis would not have any right to want independence from Pakistan if they were really Pakistanis. Examining Sorayya Khan's novel *Noor* allowed the scholar to delve into the influence of the Bangladeshi independence fight on Pakistan. *Noor* follows an Islamabadi family as they go about their daily lives. The family is made up of Ali, Nanijan, Sajida (the adoptive daughter), Hussein (the husband), and three children, Noor being the youngest. Ali participated in the Pakistani military during the 1971 fight for Bangladesh's independence. He adopted Sajida, a little girl who had been abandoned when she was five years old, after discovering her while serving in Bangladesh. Noor has been to the doctor for evaluations on a regular basis, but the nature of her disability remains unknown. After talking it over, Noor's family decided that drawing is when he feels most at ease. When she first begins to sketch her dreams, images of Ali's military service in East Pakistan and Sajida's childhood come to her. Sajida does not have a complete recollection of her history as she was taken to Pakistan when she was only five or six years old. Meanwhile, Ali has done his best to create space between himself and his past by never speaking publicly about his experiences in the conflict and by actively trying to forget about it. The use of force to transform East Pakistan into a "Pakistani" state did not foster unity but rather fueled East Pakistanis' aspirations for independence. Ali and his grandson Adel have an open conversation about this irony, and the reader doesn't miss a beat:

“What did you do there?”

“Oh, lots of things. We tried to keep the enemy behind our lines.”

“The area we occupied, I mean.”

“How can you occupy your own country?” Adel asked.

“What were you doing there, anyway?”

“Serving our country.”

“But they didn’t want your help.”

“Right,” Ali said quietly.” (200).

Adel has no idea that Ali's voice, which is wracked with agony, has a tone of despair. The terrible burden of the unspoken is something that everyone must bear, not just people like Ali who have gone to war and seen or done terrible things themselves. Sajida was an orphan before the civil war broke out since the storm of 1970 ripped her little brother from her arms. The anguish of that incident has never fully healed. The effects of war are felt by every character in the book. Pain and suffering are the exclusive outcomes of war. It made an impression on everyone's mind. Many men and women were cruelly killed and raped, while children lost both their parents and their homes. Furthermore, they endure the anguish and suffering of battle for the whole of their lives. She opens up about the histories of her grandparents and mother. Biological memory and instincts allow Noor to disclose the war's secrets, even though she did not take part in it. When Noor started to sketch a battle scenario in various hues, Ali thought his long-forgotten memories had finally come from his mental filing cabinet. She brought up terrible memories of the horrors he had experienced in the war. There are several perspectives on Ali's recollections throughout the book. In addition to denying any recollection of the events leading up to his return from the war, Ali locked himself in the shower and subjected himself to very hot water on many occasions. In doing so, he hoped to cut ties with the past and erase any lingering recollections of the battle. His memories are erased and stored in a new area of his brain when he submerges himself in water.

“In his thoughts, he deliberated on the command he had issued. His tale, a compilation of horrific events, was in his imagination. Because it was so well preserved, he had no need to get it out. Ever. Ali intended to reenter the world in that manner. (77)

In order to go back to living, Ali needs to separate who he is now from what he has done and seen. It would seem that he is avoiding situations in which he may have a more detrimental role by putting some space between himself and what he has seen and experienced. The

images by Noor make Ali realize how pointless it has been for him to try to escape his history. Many family secrets will be exposed when Ali understands that Noor's paintings might disclose the past. Compared to what he remembers from the beginning of the book, the storylines are more graphic and terrifying.

After we cleaned her wounds, I used tweezers and my fingers to remove maggots. Her wounds continued to bleed even after she passed away (154), and the tools used to cut her (scissors, writing equipment, a metal ruler splattered with blood) were at her side. I hopped on top of her. She felt hot and damp" (183).

The atrocities of war are shown by these memories of Ali. Victimized women's powerlessness and the horrors of war are shown in the graphic scenario of sexual assault. War atrocities and Ali and Sajida's hidden histories are both shown in Noor's artwork. In her and Sajida's speculations about Ali's war experiences, Nanijan echoed Ali's sentiments, "War is War," as if stating that war is war could offer a shield from what happened or how Ali was involved in the violence of 1971. In an effort to convince Nanijan of the merit of his involvement in the fight, he uses

Then, "[W]e were fighting for our lives," and "I don't do anything to them that they didn't do to us first" (176). Not your style. Or even this nation. In our own interests" (177).

Ali cites two of the official Pakistani government's war justifications—survival and retaliation—in his arguments. Noor's artwork presents events that Ali has left out of his account, therefore challenging his efforts to postpone, justify, or downplay the severity of the war's bloodshed. Sajida began to reminisce in an effort to comprehend her arrival in Islamabad. Although her memories are hazy, she can recall that a cyclone in 1970 destroyed her family, that aid workers took her to a refugee camp, and that Ali found her in East Pakistan. Eventually, Ali and Sajida get down to discussing Ali's military service, and he brings up a moment in his career about which none of them knew anything before. This alternative account states that after a mudslide, Ali and his soldiers opened fire on a group of Bengali villagers who had gathered near a mass grave. The gunshots went at Sajida and others. After listening to Ali's story, she comes to the realization that the

"the tale of her origins [...] differed from the one she had held onto since she was a girl of five and six years old" (254).

Within this realization is another: that they would have remained forever connected by a pit of mud even if Ali hadn't discovered her by the roadside. Ali, her father, may have once aimed his rifle blindly in a torrent of rain and rising waves of heated fog—and shot her dead (254-5). Consequently, the story introduces a narrative where victim and perpetrator narratives finally meet when Sajida sees herself in Ali's story of firing on innocent bystanders. This happens just before Ali, the main character of the book, starts shooting at innocent bystanders. We see the difference in how Ali and Sajida approached the issue because Ali wanted to forget the past, which left Sajida with a knowledge gap that may reveal the hurtful nature of that occurrence. In support of trauma discourses, Gabriele Schwab has said that:

"Observe the interplay between those who have done wrong and those who have done right, and you will notice that both groups are burdened by the psychological scars left by violent pasts, although to varying degrees and with different duties."

The enlightening conversation between Ali and Sajida, which also shows how the two characters responded differently to the horrible circumstances in their past, introduces his connection. The conflict is the only thing that can fill the emptiness in Sajida. Meanwhile, Ali has tried to put the dispute in the past and move on with his life. Ali gets a quiver in his chin whenever he brings up war. Meanwhile, Ali faces the seriousness of his actions and the impact he had on the events around them, and Sajida learns that her tale is different from what she had been made to believe. Many millions of people lost their lives in a storm that struck East Pakistan in November 1970. Millions of people, including Sajida's family, perished in the devastating water deluge that hit East Pakistan. In addition to Sajida's loved ones, millions of others perished in this tragedy. A literal wall known as the "Water Wall" separated Sajida from her loved ones. Ali served in the army of west Pakistan. Even though he has no notion of the exact number of casualties, he brutally slaughtered men and raped countless women. In the midst of the horrific combat circumstances, Sajida and Ali's passion blossomed. Ali served in the army of west Pakistan.

"However, showing it to Sajida clarified one thing: the effects of his actions, the sights he had witnessed, and the reality of the war would remain with him throughout his life." (251)

Because of his own experiences and feelings of shame, Ali has come to the realization that violent offenders carry their violent pasts with them. In times of strife, violent acts may occur anywhere in the world. The bond between the offender Ali and the victim Sajida shows how the effects of war are felt on an individual level and how families cope with them. Within the

family, one may see reflections of the Pakistan-Bangladesh conflict and experience its effects firsthand. In some way, these two concepts are related.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, war is never pretty. It did nothing except increase bloodshed and diminish people's joy. Although the conflict drove a wedge between countries, it also drove a wedge in people's emotions. Women were subjected to sexual assault, torture, and cruelty, while men and children were cruelly killed. The solution to any issue is never to go to war. We may not be able to change what has already happened, but the roots of most close relationships go deep into histories of violence. The book urges readers to confront the nation's savage roots rather than dwell on the past and see its losses through a heroic lens. It is evident that the logic of division contributed to the bloodshed in Bangladesh. Once again, bloodshed was the driving force for the establishment of Pakistan.

Reference

1. Chakrabarty, B. (2017). Topography of Loss: Homeland, History and Memory in Sorayya Khanâ€™s Fiction. *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, 11(1).
2. Furst, S. (2017). “Psychic Trauma: A Survey” In: S. Furst (Ed.) *Psychic Trauma*. New York, Basic Books.
3. Nader, A. J. (2019). Emergency poetry: Lyric production in the concentration camps. Cornell University.
4. Sadia, R. S. (2014). Landscape: Psychological, geographical and cultural nexuses. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 5(3), 67-70.
5. Terr, L. C., & Kernberg, P. F. (2020). Resolved: Borderline personality exists in children under twelve. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 29(3), 478-483.
6. Ferenczi, S., Balint, M., & Mosbacher, E. (2018). Notes and Fragments 1: (1920 and 1930–32). In *Final contributions to the problems and methods of psycho-analysis* (pp. 216-279). Routledge.

7. Freud, S., Breuer, I. (2015). “Preliminary Communication” In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sig-mund Freud. 2, 3-7, London, The Hogarth Press, 1955.
8. Freud, S. (2020). “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. 18, 26-33, London, The Hogarth Press, 1955.
9. Cavalcanti, sofia. (2018). Unreal homes: belonging and becoming in indian women narratives. *Humanities*. 7. 133. 10.3390/h7040133.
10. Warren, anjana. (2016). The theme of multiple dislocation and immigration as treated in diaspora literature-analyzing the cases of select south asian-american diaspora writers.
11. Verma, raj gaurav & vij, neena. (2020). Diasporic writings: narratives across space and time.
12. V, keerthi & sankar, kiruba. (2022). Identity crisis in jasmine by bharati mukherjee: a diasporic study.
13. C., Ambrose & lourdusamy, a. (2022). Review of displacement, space, and identity in the postcolonial novels of jhumpa lahiri, rohinton mistry and manju kapur. *International journal of management, technology, and social sciences*. 354-372. 10.47992/ijmts.2581.6012.0195.
14. Laxmiprasad, Puram. (2023). Diasporic literature---an overview. 2020. 10.33329/joell.7.3.20.98.
15. Christou, Anastasia. (2011). Narrating lives in (e)motion: embodiment, belongingness and displacement in diasporic spaces of home and return. *Emotion, space and society*. 4. 249-257. 10.1016/j.emospa.2011.06.007.
16. Patel, shyam. (2022). “where are you really from?”: “mapping” the south asian diasporic through poetic inquiry. *Learning landscapes*. 15. 299-310. 10.36510/learnland. v15i1.1078.