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Postmemory in the South Asian Diaspora: Inheriting the Past Through Fiction

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Abstract: The postmemory framework, rethought in terms of South Asian critical perspectives, provides a method to interpret how diasporic fiction inherits and reshapes collected histories. This research will analyse Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and *Salt and Saffron*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*. It uses Marianne Hirsch's seminal work as well as Ashis Nandy's observations on memory and trauma, Urvashi Butalia's feminist historiography of Partition and Gyanendra Pandey's theories of violence and remembrance. These narratives show how second-generation immigrants deal with identity formation, cultural nostalgia and inherited trauma. The critique, placed within the framework of transnational memory studies, places literature as a site of reimagining South Asia's fractured pasts and as an affective archive.

Keywords: Postmemory, South Asian critical perspectives, Diasporic Fiction, Collected histories, Inherited trauma.

Introduction

Memory Studies looks into how communities recall histories of the past migrating through time. In South Asia, the past comes forth with much gusto. Records of suffering, displacement and hard belonging were defined by Partition, the 1971 war, and extensive cycles of communal violence. Witnesses get older, languages traverse borders and children acquire remnants of those pasts through stories, gestures, recipes, photographs and silence. Marianne Hirsch calls this transfer postmemory, where individuals inexperienced about an event form a strong connection to it through mediation. In South Asian diasporic contexts, such attachments are formed and shaped within family rooms, at dinner tables and the public ambience of race and doubts that migrants and their children must learn to live in.

This research examines postmemory from the lens of South Asian philosophy and some chosen literary texts that have informed public discourse regarding diaspora. It borrows from Urvashi Butalia on Partition testimony and the family archive, from Ashis Nandy on the interpersonal effects of colonial rule, and from Gyanendra Pandey on the fickle nature of public memory. It puts such insights in dialogue with theories from



transnational memory studies and cultural memory scholarship. The goal is to prove that diaspora receives convoluted and often inconsistent traces that need nurture, reasoning and selection. In this way memory is both ethical and imaginative. It needs spaces to contain contradiction, silence and disputed love of home.

Kamila Shamsie, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai are part of this corpus. Through their novels and short stories, we come across second generation protagonists who dwell in names, foods, rituals and gossips of gossips they had no business in. In *Home Fire*, an open narrative about Muslim life and a missing father in Britain checks moral concerns regarding love, legality and responsibility. In *Salt and Saffron*, recipes and domestic stories not only save the aroma of Karachi in obscure places but also conceals pride and ruptures within a privileged ancestry. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, day-to-day atmospheres of instruction, consumption and chitchat give the idea about how the essence of Bengal is transferred to American suburbs and show how kids learn the feelings of isolation and conflict. In *Inheritance of Loss*, any ordinary idea of home is upset by colonial education, unstable employment and militant demands on the land.

This research aims to establish these narratives as an 'affective archive'. The phrase implies a literary realm where private conversation, familial rituals and sensory details come together to create a sense of history. It is an archive since it situates pieces in a relationship to one another and makes them serviceable to readers yet to come. The archive becomes affective since it scrupulously retains tone, atmosphere and bodily memory just as it stores facts. This structure explains how food, prayer, letters, music and everyday interactions convey memory over seas and into other people's lives. By being loyal to small facts that rarely find a place in state archives, it also explains how fiction may challenge state narratives.

A second assertion would be that the transmission is gendered and class-oriented. The kitchen, the photo album or the hushed tête-à-tête at a family get-together become the arena of memory. It is usually women who preserve those arenas. On the other hand, the grip of work, law and surveillance filter what may be stated or concealed. Literature shows these pressures as deliberate silences, coded humour and calculated decisions concerning language and address. Together the works indicate that postmemory within South Asian fiction is about the practice of making meaning in the present, balancing sadness with humour, defiance and the will to create a just future.



Marianne Hirsch clearly formulated the concept of postmemory in her work on Holocaust descendants. She explains it as the strong affective attachment the second generation has to the trauma of their ancestors. In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch emphasises how rituals, pictures and narratives become examples of mediated modes that convey the past. Even though this theoretical framework has had significant influence on literary and cultural studies, its Euro-American origins are the reason why researchers use it for other periods of history. Astrid Erll's work on transcultural memory and Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory expand the scope of postmemory to encompass interchanges between histories across geographies. Even though these contributions have highlighted comparative methodologies, Western narratives continue to dominate as the conceptual starting points.

Postcolonial theorists have broadened the spectrum of the debate by establishing postmemory within colonialism, decolonisation and migration. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" provides a framework to comprehend the hybrid cultural standpoint from which diasporic postmemory is customarily produced. In the same way, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* research illustrates how memory defies national borders and becomes interconnected with cultural production. In South Asian contexts, scholars like Ananya Jahanara and Ritu Menon examine how Partition memories traverse by oral testimony, literature and cinema. These studies bring to light that inherited memories in postcolonial societies can be archives of resilience, desire and continuity.

Partition Studies forms an essential corpus for understanding South Asian postmemory. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* keeps on being a touchstone work, blending oral history with feminist critique to extract sidelined narratives silenced by official records. *Remembering Partition* by Gyanendra Pandey debates the idea of a single authoritative memory, bring to fore the coexistence of multiple contradictory memories. Vazira Zamindar's *The Long Partition and the making of Modern South Asia* draws both bureaucratic and spatial attention to memory, delineating how boundaries define the lives of displaced populations. A rich premise for postmemory research is made through these books built on the premise that the legacy of Partition is handled through state, community and family.



Diaspora theory offers another significant strand of scholarship. *Cartographies of Diaspora* by Avtar Brah positions diaspora space as a point of convergence for migrants, natives and power structures. This provides a means of interpreting postmemory in terms of racialisation and laws related to immigration. James Clifford's research on diaspora highlights its fluid evolving nature, challenging fixed notions of homeland. Critics like Vijay Mishra have explored nostalgia, loss and cultural translation as recurring tropes in South Asian diasporic literary sphere, while others remain busy investigating how language choice and narrative form shape the passing down of memory.

In spite of all this research, a vacuum exists between postmemory theory and South Asian thinkers like Ashis Nandy, whose psychological interpretation of colonial inheritances deepens our understanding of intergenerational transmission. Nandy's stress on the internalised structures of domination meets with Butalia's fascination with gendered memory and Pandey's historiographical pluralism. This research will draw on such observations to draft a more locally situated understanding of postmemory, which acknowledges the sensory, affective and disputed nature of memory in South Asian diasporic fiction. It brings together global memory studies and South Asian intellectual traditions to generate a frame work that responds well to the particular conditions of the subcontinent's historical and cultural legacy.

Postmemory is formulated by Marianne Hirsch as the creative investment through which subsequent generations relate to the trauma of their forefather. Direct experience need not be present for the connection to determine identity. Postmemory was initially formulated based on the study of the descendants of Holocaust in Europe and America. A wider focus is necessary to comprehend the historical and cultural layers of the South Asian context. There are several features that mark the memory culture of displacement, oral history and persistence of local idioms. They are: the colonial history of the subcontinent, the turmoil of Partition, the 1971 war, and decades of communal strife. These conditions have made postmemory in South Asia an issue of trauma, pride, irony and political negotiation.

A psychological context for such inheritance is provided by Ashis Nandy's research about the intimate enemy of colonialism. He illustrates how domination hands down to the people habits of thought, self-doubt and coping mechanisms which stay on in the families long after gaining independence. These legacies are not restricted to the generations born and living under colonial domination. They are transmitted through ranking



values, social manners and speech habits. The oral history of Partition by Urvashi Butalia expresses the gendered nature of these transmissions. The kitchen, the courtyard and women's gathering feature as important spaces of telling, silencing and coded remembrance in her interviews. Butalia's research proves that the family archive is a site of selection, forgetting and preservation.

Gyanendra Pandey's narrative of recalling Partition posits that memory is a fluid repository of facts and a contested ground where numerous versions of history exist in unison. This viewpoint speaks to the experience of diaspora, where plural versions of home and history converge in a single family. One side of a family might remember migration as survival, while another may describe it as loss or betrayal. Such multiplicity is an aspect of living memory. It makes room for different moral claims and resists the diminishing effects of official account.

Diaspora theory also plays a part here. Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space becomes the site of intersection among the migrant, the native and structures of the host society. This is no neutral territory. It is filled to the brim with difference, inequality and negotiation. Here, postmemory is influenced by experiences with racialised stereotyping, immigration laws and transnational media. As a result, it is both local and global. It is connected to the particular histories of South Asia and characterised by the demands and possibilities of life outside.

This research approaches postmemory as a dynamic process by putting together these perspectives. It is formed in the exchange between inherent narrative and current circumstances. Gender roles, class location and the narrative strategies, from oral tales to the printed novel, everything plays a part in mediating it. It is further shaped by the global literary circles, which border how South Asian writers address home and foreign audiences. A reading of diaspora literature becomes a space where the past is actually reworked, and the affective archive accumulates through selection, translation, and invention. Through this, theory and literature converge to reveal how South Asian postmemory transcends national borders without sacrificing the depth and richness of its origins.

***Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie**

Home Fire relocates the narrative of Antigone to that of the British Pakistani experience, using the absent father figure to explain how political histories insert themselves into family. Aneeka, Isma and Parvaiz



are passed down a legacy of their father's militant past and the scrutiny of a society that look at their existence with suspicion. How unresolved memory is accessed by political movements is shown through Parvaiz's quest for knowledge devolving into radical milieus. The novel's oscillation between multiple perspectives shows the fractured nature of inherited narratives. For Nandy, the unresolved trauma transforms into a script that shapes subsequent choices. The narrative also brings out how the state and media's radicalised gaze decides what can be said and what cannot be said in the family.

***Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie**

Salt and Saffron show food and family anecdotes as diasporic identity carriers. Aliya's memories are constructed out of stories of "not quite twins", relatives whose narratives are etched with Partition and migration. Recipes and kitchen practices become memory aids, indicating social class and providing sensory connections to Karachi. Urvashi Butalia's comprehension of gendered memory applies when domestic labour provided by women are presented as heritage and silence. The narrative suggests that even though kitchen gossip might never make it to official records, but it remains at the core of how families recognise themselves. However, the gaps in those gossips bring out how privilege shapes the story of loss.

***Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

In "Mrs. Sen's" the simple acts of cutting fish and recalling Calcutta markets serve as lessons in cultural continuity for an American child. In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", the child protagonist imbibes the tension of the 1971 war through quiet observations and rituals. These narratives demonstrate that postmemory can be subtly conveyed through gestures alone. In keeping with Pandey's theory that memory can harbour several truths, the minimalist design gives readers room to observe the weight of the unsaid. In this way, Lahiri's narratives introduce postmemory into everyday moments.

***The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai**

Two perspectives are shown side by side. Sai with an English education and disconnected from Indian heritage lives in Kalimpong. On the other hand, Biju struggles with unstable labour in New York. Both are connected by a single thread of broken heritages: Sai of her grandfather's colonial connections, and Biju through tales of injustice and yearning for the homeland. The dual narratives portray hostility between ambition and dispossession in the diaspora. Pandey's emphasis on contested memories can be applied here.



Every person has a history influenced by lived experience and structural forces. The immigrant crisis in America, and the Himalayan insurgency illustrate how political and economic factors affect memory, just like family traditions. In this way, Desai's novel connects postmemory with the forces of globalisation.

Cross-Textual Analysis

Throughout these narratives, postmemory is presented as a middle ground between proximity and public dialogue. Shamsie illustrates how violence leaves its imprint upon family roles. Lahiri displays the silent continuation of cultural practice. Desai reveals the impact of global systems on inherited narratives. Repeating memory retainment techniques become food, fragmented from and silence. Together with historical facts, these work as parts of the affective archive, safekeeping the feelings, ambiance and the flavours that give the past its emotional vitality. By pitching these narratives into dialogue, we observe that that South Asian postmemory is a practice inflected by context, medium and the ongoing interplay of remembering and forgetting.

Discussion

The four narratives in this study portray postmemory within the South Asian diaspora as an active process of negotiation. The political and personal blur in *Home Fire*. State surveillance, public opinion and international politics on the war on terror shape the children's decisions. The novel demonstrates how inherited trauma can become either resistance or a trap, getting the subsequent generation into destructive cycles. Memory is filtered through domestic chores and elite ancestry in *Salt and Saffron*. This implies that postmemory can be a source of identity while hiding cracks in the family narrative. These two novels portray how the public and private domains influence historical transmission in numerous related ways.

The micro level of postmemory is the focus of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. The domestic scene plays a major role here. Cultural memory is preserved and passed down through the simple actions of chopping vegetables, serving food and performing rituals. The tales remind us that the long-lasting aspects of the past might not be documented in formal histories but rather in the little acts of kindness and custom that transcend oceans. This supports Butalia's observation that, despite inadequate representation in public narratives, the labour and knowledge of women are usually the bearers of memory. These instances prove that silence is an act of choice, a method of preservation that shields some narratives from external examination.



The forces of economic displacement and globalisation intensify the complexity of postmemory in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Sai and Biju both live with inherited narratives marred by factors like class, mobility and opportunity. Sai's multicultural upbringing distances her from local histories. On the other hand, Biju's yearning for home is filtered through tales of loss and inequality. Pandey's concept that several conflicting memories can coexist is realised in the fact that the narrative offers multiple truths about migration and belonging. Multiplicity lies at the heart of comprehending how diaspora works out its history.

These texts prove that postmemory of South Asian diaspora is multilayered. The demands of life in host societies, political histories, gender and class all work in tandem to influence it. The recurrent themes of food, silence and disjointed narrative imply that affective archive works through sensory and emotional memory registers. Brah's concept of diaspora space explains how memories are reconfigured in cross-cultural situations, while Nandy's theory of psychological colonialism aids in explaining the continued existence of some hierarchies and fears. These narratives demonstrate how the postmemory in the South Asian diaspora becomes a location for imaginative transformation, in which inherited experiences are reframed to suit the moral and affective demands of the current context. It brings to light literature's ability to multi-task: keeping things in the past, transforming them into a means of future identity and community formation.

Conclusion

The best way to conceptualise postmemory in South Asian diasporic literature is as a dynamic process that combines invention, metamorphosis and preservation. It involves constant reworking of inherited experiences in terms of changing conditions rather than clinging to a set legacy. The novels of Shamsie, Lahiri and Desai illustrate how the past infiltrates the present by means of both private domestic customs and global historical forces. In all instances, narrative structure matters centrally in determining how these memories are passed down and interpreted. Shamsie illustrates the risks and potential outcomes of inherited trauma through multiple viewpoints and political urgency. Little deeds and silent conversations are how Lahiri breaks down the texture of postmemory. Desai connects the transmission of loss to global patterns of migration and inequality.

The application of South Asian theoretical frameworks in this research deepens the postmemory concept by placing it within the histories of colonialism, Partition and displacements of the Indian



subcontinent. Pandey's acknowledgement of contending memories, Nandy's psychological account of colonial legacies and Butalia's feminist history offer a nuanced understanding than the frame work per se provides in its Euro-American context. These viewpoints demonstrate that suffering, coping mechanisms, humour and fortitude are all transmitted. They also draw attention to how gender and class shape what is remembered, how it is spoken and who hears it.

The concept of the affective archive provides a means to articulate the specific labour of diaspora writing. In such narratives, memory is sustained in multiple ways, namely factual evidence, sensory description, feeling and lived practice. Documents and other official records lose significance in favour of food, music, photographs and silences. Literature transcends the boundaries of state archives and official archives by making central these modes of transmission. It preserves those moments in experience that would otherwise be lost. It further permits reinterpretation in new cultural contexts.

This observation hints at directions for future research. Diasporic memory is disseminated and archived by new methods, courtesy of the advent of digital media, online communities and virtual archives. These trends will define how postmemory is constructed for the generations to come, creating new opportunities for preservation and new threats of erasure or distortion. It will be necessary to keep examining how technology, migration and cultural practice interact among themselves in order to make sense of these changes. The narratives examined in this research imply that literature will remain among the most important sites for negotiating the inherited past and envisioning futures that respect complexity instead of minimising it, as long as it pays attention to the textures of lived experience.

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